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Married Thrice to Salted Fish (三嫁咸鱼)

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I

Main Story

1

Chapter 1

Nan'an Hou Mansion, inside the bridal chamber on the eve of the wedding.

The two matrons of honor finished their assignments and took the maidservants of the Hou Mansion to file out of the inner room. They hadn't even made it past the door before they were impatiently gossiping in whispers.

"I've already lived the greater part of my lifetime and I've never seen such a beautiful man."

"It's a pity he's been married off to an invalid."

"What do you mean 'a pity'? He's married to the Hou Mansion's Young Master. If it weren't for his Eight Characters managing to fit perfectly for a Chong Xi to Young Master Hou, would Master Hou and Madam Hou deign to even consider the son of a fifth rank Imperial Hospital Yuan Pan?"

"What you say is reasonable. Whether this is a blessing or a curse, only time will tell."

……

In the middle of their conversation, the matron of honor arrived at the outer room. Before pulling close the two doors, she glanced inside. Amidst the

festive, bright red, the young man, newly married into the Hou Mansion, with the bridal veil covering his face, sat quietly like a jade carving on the bridal bed.

The door slowly closed, leaving only the rejoicing newly-married couple in the bridal chamber.

The surrounding area became quiet, and Lin Qingyu's back which had been stiff the entire day finally relaxed. He moved his body a bit and the tassels hanging on the bridal veil swayed along with him.

Wearing a bridal veil was really inconvenient. When a female bride is married, the bridal veil on her head must be lifted off by her husband. Presumably, this was also the case for when a male bride is married.

However, he was afraid that his husband was incapble of doing this.

His… "Husband".

Lin Qingyu raised his hand to take the bridal veil off himself. His vision finally opened up. He looked around at the light gauze curtains, the red canopy and

the warm quilts. Finally, he turned his attention to the sleeping man on the bed — Young Master Hou of Nan'an Hou Mansion, Lu Wancheng.

Under the candlelight, Lin Qingyu expressionlessly sized up Lu Wancheng.

Lu Wancheng had on a crimson wedding robe. His brows were like distant mountains. His lashes were long and thick, his cheeks were hallowed out and his lips were as pale as paper. Though his eyes were tightly closed and his body broken by illness, it could still be seen that he was gifted with extremely good-looking features.

From today onwards, this person was his husband.

Although he was a man, he became the wife of another man — He was the first male wife "formally and legally married" in the Dayu Dynasty.

How completely ridiculous.

He'd been preparing for the examination of the Imperial Medical Office for three years. If he were to pass the examination, he would become a medical officer just like his father. Even if he weren't to enter the palace, he could open a pharmacy in the capital and be an ordinary doctor.

It was a pity that just as he was preparing to go all out for this major undertaking, the Empress called his father to appear before her and said, "I

hear that you have a son, born on March 11, on the Year of Guiwei, at Chen Shi. Is this true?"

After getting the affirmative answer from Father Lin, the Empress asked the Emperor to confer a marriage upon the Lin Family and betroth Lin Qingyu to Nan'an Hou's eldest son, Lu Wancheng.

The officials and the nobility in the capital all knew that Lu Wancheng was born ill and had been bedridden for many years. When he was born, Nan'an Hou specially invited the imperial physician to come see him. The imperial physician once asserted that Young Master Hou would not survive past the age of Weak Crown.

This year, Lu Wancheng was nineteen and his condition was getting worse by the day. Seeing that his days were dwindling and that the end was approaching, Nan'an Hou had no other choice but to write for help to the Dayu Dynasty's National Teacher, who was said to have access to the Heavens and knew the ways of ghosts and gods. The letter the National Teacher gave him in reply contained only one line of Eight Characters, which was exactly: March 11th on the Year of Guiwei, at Chen Shi.

It was a crime punishable by death to disobey the Emperor's order. Lin Qingyu thought it no great loss if his were to be the only death, but he had to protect

his elderly parents and his younger brother. In this way, he became Lu Wancheng's Chong Xi male wife.

More than ten years of hard study, all turned into a joke.

At this moment, Hai Shi had passed. The servant girl outside the door, who was keeping watch for the night, said, "Shaojun, the hour is here. Kindly serve Young Master Hou to bed."

Lin Qingyu looked at his sleeping husband and clenched his fingers — she wanted him to serve Lu Wancheng? What a joke.

The rules and custom one needed to abide by after marrying into a wealthy family are always complicated and cumbersome. Although it had been a rushed Chong Xi, the Nan'an Hou Mansion still sent an instructor aunt to the Lin Mansion to teach Lin Qingyu on the so-called "Way of a Male Wife".

Before the wedding, he had his whole body washed clean, inside and out. Something like grease had even been applied.

Lin Qingyu was not a good gay man. He has never suffered such humiliation. If it weren't for protecting the people in the Lin Family, he would have liked nothing more than to take Lu Wancheng to perish along with him.

Seeing that there was no movement in the bridal room, the servant girl urged once again, "Young Master, it's time to go to bed."

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and pushed down on the upsurge of malice. He blew out the candles, leaving only one red candle in front of the bed. Lu Wancheng was still wearing the gold embroidered wedding robe, lying atop the quilt. Sleeping this way might be quite uncomfortable.

But then what did it matter to him? He longed for the day that Lu Wancheng slept forever.

Lin Qingyu walked to the bed and his eyes fell on Lu Wancheng's crossed hands on his chest.

The Lin family was a medical family. Lin Qingyu studied medicine with his father since he was a child. When he was a teenager, he left home to study and follow a famous teacher. Just by looking at Lu Wancheng's complexion, he

knew that Lu Wancheng was terminally ill and must be suffering from severe and chronic disease.

In order to confirm this, Lin Qingyu condescended to feel the pulse of this sick seedling. Lu Wancheng's wrist was frighteningly cold, as though it had been fished out of cold water.

Just as he suspected, Lu Wancheng's vitality was exhausted. His pulse showed signs of approaching death. Unless some miracle-working doctor reincarnated, Lu Wancheng would last for only half a year at most.

He needed only to endure for half a year. When Lu Wancheng passed away, he could be freed.

Lin Qingyu unconsciously applied force on his hand, leaving two shallow marks on Lu Wancheng's wrist.

Suddenly, those pale fingertips moved.

Lin Qingyu instinctively let go, letting Lu Wancheng's hand fall back onto the bed. He saw his eyes rolling under his lids, his long lashes trembling slightly.

Was Lu Wancheng going to wake up?

Lin Qingyu had a solemn expression as he stared at Lu Wancheng

unblinkingly. Under his sword-like gaze, Lu Wancheng slowly opened his eyes.

Lu Wancheng's eyes seemed to be covered with mist, it was as though he couldn't see anything. When the mist in his eyes dissipated, a trace of puzzlement appeared. "Huh…? Where did this classical beauty come from…?"

Heh, this lecher. He's already on the verge of death and he still didn't forget to lay on the flattery.

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "You're awake."

Lu Wancheng was momentarily dazed. He asked in a hoarse voice, "Who are you?"

A hint of surprise flashed in Lin Qingyu's eyes. "Do you not know who I am?"

This was their first time meeting, but so long as Lu Wancheng had grown a brain, he should already understand just by seeing the bridal attire he had on him.

Lu Wancheng shook his head, let out muffled coughs and said, "Although it would sound very cliche, I still want to ask. Where is this? And why am I here?"

Lin Qingyu: "…" Could it be that the sickness has made him stupid? Or did Lu

Wancheng not even know about this marriage?

Before the Chong Xi, he heard his father mention Lu Wancheng's condition. It was said that Lu Wancheng has been dazed and muddled for the past month. If

this were the case, it was likely that Lu Wancheng was completely ignorant of this marriage.

Lin Qingyu's expression eased a little. "My surname is Lin and my name is Qingyu."

"Lin Qingyu? Lin…Qing…Yu." Lu Wancheng said his name. As though hitting upon something, he said, "The beautiful imperial doctor who died in the Eastern Palace?"

Lin Qingyu frowned. "What?"

Lu Wancheng looked at him for a moment, his face filled with shock. He was then suddenly struggling to sit up.

Out of habit as a doctor, Lin Qingyu pushed the flailing patient back down. "What do you think you're doing?"

"Mirror." Lu Wancheng covered his chest with one hand, and pointed at the bronze mirror on the cabinet with the other. His long hair lay scattered on the pillow, "Cough, cough. Give me the mirror."

The mirror?

Lin Qingyu handed the bronze mirror to Lu Wancheng and asked, "What's

wrong with this mirror?"

Lu Wancheng saw himself in the mirror and then, as though seeing a ghost, his eyes widened suddenly. His expression looked as if he had a thousand words to say. He held back for a long time, until he almost couldn't breathe. In the end he only said one word. "…Fuck."

The servant girl on night watch heard the movement in the birdal chamber. She knocked on the door and asked, "Shaojun, has something happened?"

Lin Qingyu looked at Lu Wancheng who was dazed as if he'd been struck by lightning, and said calmly, "Tell your Master Hou and the Madam that Young Master Hou is awake."

The servant girl immediately sent someone to report to Nan'an Hou and Madam Hou. They then invited the doctor to come. After a while, the bridal room was full of people. It was Lin Qingyu instead who stood by the outermost side, acting like a complete outsider.

Doctor Zhang, who was examining Lu Wancheng's pulse, was not an imperial doctor, but he too was a famous doctor in the capital. Doctor Zhang stroked

his beard and said in disbelief, “This is the first time this old man has encountered such a situation during his many decades of practicing medicine.”

Madam Hou said eagerly, “Doctor Zhang, could it be that Wancheng…?”

“Madam, do not be impatient. That the Young Master Hou has woken up is a good thing. Only that, this pulse… Yesterday, this old man also diagnosed Young Master Hou’s pulse. At that time, Young Master Hou’s vitality was clearly exhausted and he was not far from the five decays of Heaven and Man. But now, it’s like a completely different person.” Doctor Zhang clicked his

tongue in wonder. “It’s like the gods have lent their assistance, pouring vitality into his body.”

Lin Qingyu pondered quietly. Lu Wancheng suddenly got better and it wasn’t that last radiance of the setting sun. It was a bit weird. He has never seen a similar case in any of the medical books.

Madam Hou was taken aback and asked, “Then is his illness about to get better?”

The doctor did not dare to confrim. He considered it and said, “At least, there is a gleam of hope.”

“Good, good…” Madam Hou burst into tears with excitement, “Wancheng, did you hear that? Your illness has taken a turn for the better.”

Lu Wancheng had no special reaction. He only said, “I heard.”

The doctor added, “Madam, Young Master Hou has just woken up and he still needs to rest.”

Madam Hou wiped away her tears, and said, “Then mother won’t interrupt your rest — What about Qingyu? Where is Shaojun?”

Everyone looked at each other. Lin Qingyu stepped forward and said,

“Madam.”

Madam Hou held his hand and said with a smile, “Qingyu, as soon as you married into the Hou Mansion, Wancheng’s illness has taken a turn for the better. As expected, the National Teacher is gifted with divine strategy and

wonderful planning. You are Wancheng's savior. We shall be leaving our Wancheng in your care."

Lu Wancheng raised his head and looked at Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu said with a smile, "Do not worry, Madam. I will do my utmost to take care of Young Master Hou."

The momo next to Madam Hou teased, "Ai, Shaojun shouldn't be calling Young Master Hou the same way we do. You should call him 'husband'——"

Everyone laughed and no one noticed that Lin Qingyu's hands, hidden in his sleeves, clenched tightly.

Everyone dispersed and the peace in the bridal room was restored once again. The red candle was about to burn empty.

Lu Wancheng lay silent on the bed. His brows, sometimes furrowed and sometimes smoothened. It looked as though he was trying to remember something.

Lin Qingyu was too lazy to pay any attention to him. He stood by the window, looking at the strange moon outside, his body seemed to be covered with moonlight.

After an unknown length of time, Lu Wancheng let out a sigh. He said,

“Buddy…oh, that’s not right — Beauty, come here.”

Lin Qingyu said coolly, “Who are you calling?”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “Is there anyone else here?”

Lin Qingyu turned around. The swaying candlelight dyed a trace of crimson blush on his cheeks. The teardrop mole in the corner of his eye turned as bright as a peony.

He was beautiful but didn’t seem to have a good temper.

Lu Wancheng coughed a couple of times and nodded at Lin Qingyu to sit. Lin Qingyu remained standing by the bed, keeping an arm’s distance from Lu Wancheng.

“I had just been sorting out the main threads.” Lu Wancheng’s tone was calm, without the agitation when he had first woken up.

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “And what has that got to do with me?”

“It’s got a little to do with you. Because what I was thinking about pertains to your main threads.” Having said just these few words, Lu Wancheng was already a little weak and pale, “If I’d come a few days earlier, I definitely

wouldn't have agreed to this marriage where you would only inevitably wind up as a lifelong widow."

Lin Qingyu's expression was numb. "What's the use of you saying this now?"

"Indeed. Now we're married, we've tied the knot, we've performed the wedding ritual and the whole capital knows that we are husband and wife."

Lin Qingyu sneered: "No."

"Huh?"

Lin Qingyu sneered, "We didn't perform the marriage ritual. You were asleep the whole time. I performed the ritual with a big cock."

Lu Wancheng scoffed. "That's alright. It's fine. If we didn't perform the ritual, that's good too. You don't have to take this marriage seriously. I won't live past half a year, so you'll just have to be wronged for half a year. When I die, you can make off with my inheritance and return to the Lin Residence. This way you won't suffer too much of a loss."

Lin Qingyu was startled, and said suspiciously, " Is there such a good thing? "

"There is. But how much inheritance you can bring home depends on your own ability." Lu Wancheng leaned back on the soft pillow, and said in a lazy tone, "With this broken body, I won't be engaging in any domestic struggles.

The waters run deep in Nan'an Hou Mansion. I can't grasp it. I just want drift along, eat and wait to die. I want to be a salted fish."

Does the story seem interesting? However, before you decide to proceed further, I would just like to warn that the MC, Lin Qingyu is no saint. He's kind of wicked; the kind to exact payment for offenses. He fires no warning shots and his methods may seem excessive but given his weak position and his dangerous situation, I think it's only…practical. He has to make sure that his first shot counts, after all, he might not get a second one.

2

Chapter 2

Although Lin Qingyu didn't completely understand Lu Wancheng's words, he thought he roughly understood what the other meant. For Lu Wancheng to be able to talk so lightly about his limited days, could it be that he really wasn't afraid of death?

When all was said and done, Lu Wancheng was someone ill. Being able to hold on till now was already his limit. He lay down on the bed and said, "Beauty, you…"

Lin Qingyu said sternly, "Stop with that inconsiderate name-calling."

Because of his appearance, when Lin Qingyu had been pursuing his studies on the road, he was often harassed by lechers. Towards these people who called him "beauty" or "baobei" at every turn, he wanted nothing more than to stuff

their mouths with the potion he'd mixed himself that could force them to shut their mouths.

However, although Lu Wancheng called him a beauty, he didn't stare blankly at him like a frivolous person. He wasn't completely hopeless.

"How fierce. Aren't you happy being praised for your good looks?" Lu Wancheng closed his eyes and said. "Whatever, I'm going to rest. Just do as you please."

After all that waste of time, it was already past zishi. There really was nothing else to do except to go to bed.

The servant girl just now had helped Lu Wancheng take off his clothes. She had also wiped his arms and face. While on the other hand, Lin Qingyu was still wearing the dress and crown he had used to the wedding. A huadian had been painted between his brows and he still hasn't washed off the makeup on his face.

Yes, he had on makeup today. Due to his strongly worded request, the matron of honor had only painted his brows and lips. However, because of the cold and aloof beauty of his face, after using even just this little bit, his lips appeared as red as flames and his brows appeared as though they'd been drawn from a painting. This look made others praise him without cease but for him, it alarmed his heart and sent his body leaping. What he had pursed between his lips seemed not to be rouge paper but shackles that imprisoned him. And the

ones who placed these shackles on him was this entire Nan'an Hou Mansion as well as…the Imperial family.

He would remember this hatred.

There was that matron of honor too who had to forced him use ointment and made that certain some place feel extremely uncomfortable. He would remember her too.

As for his ignorant "husband"… If what Lu Wancheng said was true, they truly could spend the next six months together in peace. Husband and wife in name but not in truth. He could barely force himself not to harbor any hatred against Lu Wancheng.

He was a man on the verge of death, nothing more. What need was there to bother with him?

Naturally there couldn't be two beds in the bridal chamber. The only bed was occupied by Lu Wancheng. Lin Qingyu decided to spend the night on the luohan.

At this time, it was shortly after the Lantern Festival. The days had yet to warm up. You were sure to catch a cold sleeping on a bare luohan. Lin Qingyu saw that there was an extra quilt on marriage bed. The servants of the Hou

Mansion must have deliberately prepared it, afraid that their precious Young Master Hou wouldn't be used to sharing the same quilt with someone else.

In that case, Lin Qingyu had no wish to be polite.

Even in sleep, Lu Wancheng could not escape the torment of illness and pain; and his brows were lightly furrowed. Lin Qingyu's movements when taking the quilt had been very light but Lu Wancheng still woke up.

When Lu Wancheng opened his eyes, Lin Qingyu was in the middle of bending over. His hair hung before his chest and fell on the other's cheeks, making it a little itchy.

The two locked eyes with each other. Without waiting for Lu Wancheng to speak, Lin Qingyu said first, "I'm taking the quilt."

Lu Wancheng smiled. "Take it."

Lin Qingyu carried the quilt to the luohan and spread it out. Just as he was about to lie down, Lu Wancheng said, "Aren't you going to undress before going to bed?"

Although the wedding dress worn by a male bride wasn't as complicated and cumbersome as that of a woman's, it was still a loose corseted thing covered in layer upon layer of robes. It was far less convenient and comfortable than

wearing ordinary clothes. Just looking at it made Lu Wancheng feel tired for him.

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “Naturally, I’m going to take it off.”

Turning his back to Lu Wancheng, he raised his hand to undo the outermost buckle. The coat fell from his shoulders and slid to his ankles. Piece after piece of clothing were removed, and after a while, he was just like Lu Wancheng, dressed only in close-fitting night wear.

After taking off his clothes, he turned around and glanced at marriage bed. — Very good, Lu Wancheng had fallen asleep again.

Early the next morning.

Lin Qingyu had always been a light-sleeper and a quiet cough from Lu Wancheng was enough to wake him up. On the bed, Lu Wancheng was lying on his side, his side profile was mostly blocked by the scattered strands of his hair. His sleeping posture was haphazard, without the slightest bit of dignity.

As soon as Lin Qingyu got up from the luohan, there came a knock on the door. “Young Master, Shaojun, it’s time to get up. According to customs, you must go serve tea to Master Hou and Madam Hou.”

Lu Wancheng showed no sign of waking up. Lin Qingyu opened the door and let them in. The maid walking in front was Feng Qin who was Lu Wancheng’s

personal maid. She entered the room, carrying in hot water. When she saw the soft quilt on the luohan, a strange expression momentarily stole over her face.

Half of the maids who came were there to assist Lin Qingyu to freshen up. The remaining half went to get Lu Wancheng up. Lin Qingyu changed into a snow-blue robe. His long hair was simply tied up with a jade crown. On him these

ordinary clothes seemed graceful and full of elegance. However, compared with yesterday's wedding attire, it was less bright and more dignified.

Feng Qin wanted to put on makeup for Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu said, "No need."

Feng Qin said, "But I saw that Shaojun had on makeup yesterday."

"And as you said, that was yesterday." Lin Qingyu's eyes fell on the dressing case on the table and he said irritably, "Take this out."

Lin Qingyu had finished putting on his clothes but Lu Wancheng was still asleep. A few maidservants had gathered around the bed, calling him softly.

"Young Master, it's time for you and Shaojun to serve tea to the Master and Madam."

"Young Master…"

Lu Wancheng remained motionless, his expression calm, his hands folded on his chest, looking like a Buddha statue.

Feng Qin said uneasy, "It can't be that Young Master Hou has fainted again?"

Lin Qingyu stepped forward and carefully observed Lu Wancheng. He said,

“No, he just died in his sleep. You can force him to wake up.”

Feng Qin asked, unable to understand, “Shaojun, how are we to ‘force’ him?”

“Shout louder or take off his quilt.” Lin Qingyu said, “But don’t forget. He is ill. So unless you want his condition to get worse, don’t disturb his rest.”

Feng Qin said, “But Master Hou and the Madam…”

Lin Qingyu interrupted her, “He’s already this sick and you want him to serve tea? Are the rules more important than his life?” In Dayu, it was the newly married husband and wife together who serve tea to the parents on the day after their wedding. If Lu Wancheng doesn’t go, then he probably won’t have to go either.

Originally, before the Empress had ordered this marriage, Nan’an Hou’s wife, Liang Shi, had sent someone to visit Lin Qingyu’s home and propose a marriage. When he decisively refused, she then asked the Empress, thus putting the Lin Family in a state of either marrying or dying. Not to mention treating the Nan’an couple as “in-laws”, he didn’t even want to pay any attention to them.

Feng Qin didn’t dare decide on this matter. She sent a servant girl to report to Liang Shi. Not long afterwards, the momo by Liang Shi’s side came to give her answer, “The madam says that since it is rare for the young master to sleep so

peacefully, we should let him continue to sleep. She and Master Hou will drink tea served by Shaojun alone."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Sure enough, Madam loves her son like life."

Living in the Hou Mansion, he was given no choice but to follow. No matter how reluctant, Lin Qingyu could only put on a snow cape and follow the momo to the front hall.

Along the way, the momo prattled on and on about the rules of the Hou Mansion's inner house. Lin Qingyu took her to be talking utter rubbish, automatically cutting her voice out of his ears. Yesterday, he'd been wearing the bridal veil and he could only see the few steps under his feet. Today he was able to see the true appearance of the Nan'an Hou Mansion. Although he had never been to the palace, he had gone to the prince's mansion with his father. The magnificence of the Nan'an Hou's Mansion was not inferior to that of the prince's mansion. With its carved beams and painted buildings, gorgeous and noble, it showed that Nan'an Hou's status in the court was extraordinary.

In the front hall, Nan'an Hou and Liang Shi were seated upon the seat of honor. Nan'an Hou was nearing buhuo, taciturn and with a resolute and

steadfast face. Liang Shi, though getting on in the years was still attractive, with a kindly face. She looked like a good-natured upper-class lady.

Lin Qingyu took the tea handed to him by the momo. He couldn't help imagining himself putting poison in it.

What poison could he give that would let them have the taste of losing their freedom?

The two drank Lin Qingyu's tea. Liang Shi said with a smile on her face, "Qingyu, did you sleep well last night?"

Lin Qingyu recovered and said, "It was satisfactory."

"From now on, the Hou Mansion will be your home. If there is anything you are not used to, just tell mother."

"Thank you, Madam."

The momo said, displeased, "Why is Shaojun still using 'Madam'? Just like Young Master Hou, you are to call her 'mother'."

This momo was really obsessed with this matter of changing terms of address. He was simply going to call her 'Change-your-title Momo'. If she wanted so

much for Liang Shi to be called that, then why doesn't she just call Liang Shi that herself?

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and said, "It is force of habit. It may take a while for me to change my terms of address. I hope Madam Hou will forgive me."

Nan'an Hou looked displeased. Liang Shi said graciously, "There is no harm done. There will be plenty of time for that. The first few months after I married into the Hou Mansion, I also often forgot to correct myself."

Nan'an Hou said, "Despite that, you must still to get used to it as soon as possible, so as not to be a source of amusement in the eyes of others."

Lin Qingyu thought of his parents and endured silently. "Yes."

Liang Shi took another sip of tea and said, "Your Eight Characters and Wancheng's are a match made in heaven. Master Hou and I also fancied this point, so we asked his Majesty to bestow this marriage. Qingyu, in the future,

you must put your husband first in all matters. Wait upon him by his sickbed and let your good fortune rub off on Wancheng."

Lin Qingyu nodded, stupefied.

Nan'an Hou said, "Speaking of which, you are the son of the pan guan of the Imperial Hospital. You have also studied under a famous teacher. Your medical skills are definitely not bad."

Lin Qingyu's chest filled with a burst of oppression.

Yes, his medical skills were not bad. Before all this, he could have practiced medicine or pharmacy to help the people; he could have helped the dying and healed the injured. Now, he was locked up in the inner house, forced to be a male wife who was to be content with his own lot. And the main culprit even had the gall to say, "Although Doctor Zhang is in charge of looking after Wancheng's condition, you can also watch over him a bit. Do not waste your medical skills."

Nan'an Hou worked as the Minister of Revenue. He had many responsibilities and he left after saying these words. Liang Shi gave a jade bracelet to Lin Qingyu. She said, "This was part of the dowry I brought from my birth family. I had planned on giving it to Wancheng's son in the future. But now…" Liang Shi paused and smiled again. "No matter, you keep it."

Lin Qingyu could not have failed to understand Liang Shi's intention. She took so much effort to get Lu Wancheng a male wife but and didn't forget to disdain

the male wife for being unable to bear children.

They were all worthy of being members of the Nan'an Hou Mansion. Each was worse than the other. It was only Lu Wancheng who he's barely able to tolerate.

Lin Qingyu returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion where Lu Wancheng lived. He threw the brocade box containing the jade bracelet to Feng Qin. Feng Qin said, "Shaojun, welcome back. Young Master Hou hasn't woken up yet. He's been sleeping for so long, is there really nothing the matter…?"

Lin Qingyu stopped walking towards the study. "I'll take a look."

What he wanted to see was not Lu Wancheng, but the Lu Wancheng's once-in-a-century pulse. Doctor Zhang, who had diagnosed Lu Wancheng's pulse last night, as he understood, was indeed a well-known doctor with real ability and talent. It would be a pity not examine the pulse that even Doctor Zhang had never seen before.

When Lin Qingyu walked into the inner room, Lu Wancheng was still asleep. He was even still in the same posture he had before Lin Qingyu left. He stood by the bed, looking down upon Lu Wancheng. He had to say that Lu Wancheng didn't look like his parents very much. His appearance was much more refined than that of Nan'an Hou and his wife.

Lin Qingyu rolled up his sleeves and stretched out his fingertips. He had yet to touch Lu Wancheng's pulse when his hand was caught without warning. A

loose, careless voice spoke, “Sneaking up like that, what were you going to do, Lin Qingyu?”

Lin Qingyu’s hand stiffened. “Let go.” Given Lu Wancheng’s body, he was afraid that Lu Wancheng would faint if he tried even a little bit of force to break free.

Lu Wancheng let go. His eyes were closed, but the corners of his lips curled up. “Don’t get excited, I don’t like men. You don’t have to be so guarded towards me.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes widened. “You don’t like men?”

“That’s right. As I remember, even though male homosexuality was in vogue during the Dayu dynasty, not everyone was a cut-sleeve.” Lu Wancheng opened his eyes and said, “What about you? Are you?”

Lin Qingyu choked.

It has been a month since he was forced into this marriage and no one has ever asked him this question. Anyway, he was going to marry a man. What difference did it make if he liked men or women?

“I… Naturally, I’m not one either.”

Lu Wancheng covered his lips and coughed a few times. He then said sympathetically, “Then you must feel extremely wronged at being married to

me for a Chong Xi?"

Lin Qingyu's brows were gloomy. "What nonsense. If you were to be given to me in Chong Xi, wouldn't you feel wronged?"

"That's why I said I would make it up to you."

"To say it is easy. What exactly will you do to compensate me?"

"My inheritance."

Lin Qingyu sneered. "Your inheritance that I have to fight for."

Lu Wancheng asked, "Then what compensation do you want? As long as it's not troublesome or strenuous, I will give it to you."

He wanted to take the examination of the Imperial Medical Office. He wanted to leave the Nan'an Hou Mansion. He wanted to do what he wanted to do. But he knew it was almost impossible. The marriage between him and Lu

Wancheng was bestowed by the Emperor. Even if Lu Wancheng agrees for him to leave, he would still need his Majesty's approval.

Lin Qingyu was silent for a while. He said, "Give me your hand."

Lu Wancheng held his wrist in his other hand, and said warily, "Eh? What are you doing?"

Lin Qingyu said impatiently, "I'm going to check your pulse."

"You should have said so earlier." Lu Wancheng raised his hand and presented his wrist, "Doctor Lin, please."

A charcoal brazier was burning in the room and Lu Wancheng's entire body was covered under the quilt. His wrist though remained cold. Feeling the beating of his pulse, Lin Qingyu frowned.

Lu Wancheng's body was better, but the disease was not eradicated. He could feel the "sudden vitality" that Doctor Zhang said but Lu Wancheng's body was like a bottomless pit, consuming this vitality little by little. Unless the root of

the illness was eradicated, Lu Wancheng's vitality would be exhausted and he would still not survive past half a year.

There was no cure for Lu Wancheng's disease.

Seeing Lin Qingyu's face sinking like water, Lu Wancheng asked, "Am I saved?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "Why would you think so?"

"Because you don't look happy." Lu Wancheng looked as though this all had nothing to do with him, "If I were in your place, I should think that you would want me to die sooner."

Lin Qingyu couldn't help asking, "Do you really not care about your life or death?"

"There's nothing to care about." Lu Wancheng smiled, "My fate is not in my hands, it's in Heaven's. Don't worry, my widow, you're sure to be one."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

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Salted Fish Lu: My fate is not in my hands, it's in the author's. I'm dead [Lying Flat.jpg]

3

Chapter 3

Lin Qingyu got up and left. The patient himself has lost all desire to live, so what did he have to worry about? The sooner Lu Wancheng died, the sooner he could return to the Lin Residence.

Lin Qingyu went to the study. He came to the Nan'an Hou Mansion with only two boxes of things. One box contained clothing, and the other contained medical books. According to the rules of the Hou Mansion, he could bring two dowry maids with him. But he wasn't used to being served by a woman. When he was in the Lin Residence, he'd had one page who grew up with him, who joined him in his studies and reading.

It wasn't some glorious thing to be married as a male wife. He didn't want his little page to enter the Hou Mansion as "dowry." And so he came to Hou Mansion alone, with probably only this one box of medical books to keep him company in the future.

Among medical books, there were many ancient ones that he had yet to read. He didn't know, there may be records of cases similar to Lu Wancheng's in these ancient books. Lin Qingyu immersed himself in his reading and finally calmed down.

When he was in school, his classmates thought that medical books were boring and complicated. Reading just three pages was enough to get them sleeping.

But for Lin Qingyu, those novels his schoolmates yearned for weren't even a tenth as interesting as medical books. He, like his father, had a highly-retentive memory. What his classmates took a day memorize, he needed only to read once to be able to memorize and recite backwards.

His father was once of a mind to have him take the imperial examination, but he just wanted to be a medical officer. He liked the feeling of a patient getting better under his own hands. He wanted to enter the Imperial Hospital, where famous doctors from all over the world gathered. He wanted to hone his

medical skills with them, to find cures for all kinds of intractable diseases, and to help the people.

He could have. He almost could have.

“Shaojun.”

The voice did not sound like that of a servant girl’s. Lin Qingyu looked up. Sure enough, it was the momo who kept pestering him to change his way of address. It was said that her surname was Liu.

Lin Qingyu said coldly, “What?”

Liu momo was all smiles. “Shaojun, it’s time to eat.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t have any appetite at all, but these dogs in the Nan’an Hou Mansion weren’t worth harming his body over. “Bring the food, I’ll eat in the study.”

Liu momo waved her hands again and again. “This is cannot be, Shaojun.”

Lin Qingyu frowned, “Why can it not be? Does the Hou Mansion’s rules say ‘no eating in the study’?”

“That is not the case. It is the madam’s order. It was because of the Chong Xi that our Young Master got his life back. Shaojun is the Young Master’s lucky

star. You must stay together so that the Young Master's illness can heal faster."

To refute such remarks would only make him appear stupid. If a Chong Xi really could cure diseases, what need would Dayu have for doctors? Why would the court go to such great lengths to train medical officers? If you get sick, then just get married; then everything would be fine and well with the world.

Lin Qingyu looked at Liu momo and asked, "Momo, how old will you be this year?"

Liu momo didn't know what Lin Qingyu intended by asking this question. Nevertheless, she still smiled and said, "This old woman is fifty and two."

"A fifty-two year old who looks like forty-two. I might not necessarily live to reach fifty-two. Momo is very lucky. You should be the one to take care of the young master, that way he would heal even faster."

Liu momo's smile froze. "Shaojun jests."

Lin Qingyu's face turned cold. "Do I look like I'm joking? Go."

Liu momo's face turned extremely ugly. She was Madam Hou, Liang Shi's confidant. Who in the Hou Mansion, save for the masters, dared to not treat her with respect? Even the masters usually gave her a lot of face. What was Lin Qingyu? Wording it nicely, he was the Shaojun, but put another way, he was just the male wife "bought" by the Hou Mansion to renew the life of the Young

Master. This was only his first day since he was married into this family and he was already scowling at her?

Seeing that Liu momo made no move to leave, Lin Qingyu sneered, “You do not know to recognize your betters. A servant dares to turn a deaf ear to the Shaojun’s order. — Is this not one of the rules of the Hou Mansion?”

Madam Liu lowered her eyes. “This servant dares not. It is only that the Madam has personally ordered this servant to bring this chicken soup she had

ordered to be stewed with ginseng. If Shaojun and the Young Master does not have a taste of it, it would be a betrayal of the madam's good intentions."

Ginseng Chicken Soup?

Stupid. Did they not know that a person who is in poor health cannot handle tonic-like foods? Did Liang Shi think that her son was not sick enough?

"She had merely personally ordered someone to make it. She hadn't personally made it herself." Lin Qingyu no longer looked at her. He turned the page of his medical book. "You give it to the Young Master."

Liu momo gritted her teeth. She secretly gave Lin Qingyu a dirty look, took the chicken soup and left.

Calm was restored in the study but Lin Qingyu grew a bit absent-minded instead.

Lu Wancheng is currently suffering from gastrointestinal damage. Having him ingest tonics would only be putting frost atop snow on his already weak body.

Lu Wancheng has been ill since he was a child and prolonged illness turns patients into doctors. How could Liang Shi, as his mother, not even know this?

Once or twice was fine but if done over the long term, Lu Wancheng's body would definitely become weaker and weaker.

Fine, he'll just consider it as him doing good works and accumulating merit. Lu Wancheng's situation was really rare, and he wanted more time to study it.

Lin Qingyu left the study and came to the dining room; but he didn't see Lu Wancheng. He asked a passing maidservant, "Where is the young master?"

Maidservant: "The young master said he was too lazy to get up and wanted to eat in bed."

It was only right for laid up patients to lie down more.

Lin Qingyu headed once again to the bedroom. Before he even entered the room, he was already saying, "The ginseng chicken soup your mother sent, don't…"

Sitting up in bed, Lu Wancheng was eating rice porridge with some side dishes. "Huh?"

There was a square table in front of Lu Wancheng's bed. Most of the things on the table were light dishes, except for that big pot of chicken soup with ginseng

slices floating in it. Ling Qingyu saw the pristine soup ladle beside the pot. Lu Wancheng actually hadn't touched the chicken soup.

Lu Wancheng chewed slowly, swallowing all the contents in his mouth before saying, "Doctor Lin, what an unexpected visit from such an infrequent visitor. Have you eaten?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "This is ginseng chicken soup that your mother personally ordered someone to make. Why won't you drink it?"

Lu Wancheng wiped his mouth with the kerchief, and said casually, "I can't eat the things she sends."

Lin Qingyu asked curiously, "Why?"

"They say I have half a year left to live. So any moment less than that would be less than half a year. If they want to send me away sooner, then I'd have to make a fuss about that."

Lin Qingyu became more and more surprised. "Why would they want to send you away sooner?"

Lu Wancheng winked. "Care to venture a guess?"

Lin Qingyu was momentarily speechless. "Do you think you're funny?"

Lu Wancheng laughed out loud. He laughed so much, he accidentally choked

himself, coughing again and again, his handsome face turning a pale red.

Lin Qingyu had no idea what Lu Wancheng was laughing about. But it wasn't difficult to see that the relationship between Lu Wancheng and Liang Shi

wasn't the 'compassionate mother and filial son' relationship that it seemed to be on the surface.

Seeing the maidservant by his side hurriedly patting Lu Wancheng's back for him, Lin Qingyu took back his half-outstretched hand. "What's so funny?"

Lu Wancheng stopped coughing, with a smile in his breath, "I am but a little funny but still very full of delight."

Lin Qingyu disdained, "With your broken body, I'm afraid you won't be able to make use of whatever delightfulness you have, no matter how big it is."

"You are right." Lu Wancheng sighed, "This body is really holding me back. If only I were in my own…"

"What do you mean?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and sidestepped the question. "Well, I'm here now. Doctor Lin, sit down and have a meal. I can't drink this chicken soup but you can."

Lin Qingyu said, "Where do you want me to sit?"

Lu Wancheng looked around, "Why don't you come sit on the bed too?"

Lin Qingyu didn't feel the least bit grateful. "Excuse me. Just eat by yourself. I

will be taking my leave."

"Wait." Lu Wancheng stopped him, "I have something I want to give you. I was just reading the list of gifts we've received from the guests and I've found a gift that suits you very well."

Lin Qingyu didn't even look at it. "No."

Lu Wancheng gave a "tsk": "At least, take a look at it first. Just a look won't cost you anything. — Hua Lu."

Hua Lu was the other maid besides Feng Qin, who was stationed to serve in the room. She was rather quick-witted and lovely. She presented him with

something and said with a smile, “If the young master hadn’t told me, I wouldn’t have known what this is.”

Lin Qingyu condescended to give it a look and was startled.

What Hua Lu had given him was something similar to a cloth bag. It was made of leather and could be rolled up easily. Spread out, it was only a thin layer and couldn’t hold anything.

Ordinary people might not be able to tell what it was, but doctors would know at a glance that this was an acupuncture bag. The inner double layer was where the needles were inserted.

Lin Qingyu couldn’t help from reaching out his hand, stroking this first class leather bag that felt so good to the touch. His long eyelashes trembled slightly, his eyes turned deep and dark.

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “Do you like it?”

The Nan’an Hou Mansion had celebrated a wedding and most of those who sent gifts were high-ranking dignitaries in the capital. Lin Qingyu picked up the gift list from the table and looked at it. Most of them were gold, silver and

jade, antique calligraphy and paintings. A small acupuncture bag paled in comparison against them.

But Lu Wancheng insisted on giving him this.

Lin Qingyu looked at the characters embroidered in gold thread on the outside of the bag. “Lu-Lin Wedding; Forever with one Heart” A self-deprecating smile appeared at the corner of his lips. “Thank you, Young Master Hou, for your kindness, but what is the point of giving me this?”

Lu Wancheng placed a fist against his lips and coughed. “Why would it be pointless? You can use it in the future.”

“Oh? For your exclusive use, you mean?”

Lu Wancheng’s smile faded and he was silent for a while. He said, “I’m sorry, I didn’t mean that. I just…” Halfway through, he lost all seriousness. “If you don’t want it, then you don’t want it. Don’t be angry. Although an angry Doctor Lin is also very eye-catching, too much anger is bad for your health. As the saying goes, ‘If you think back on it, you will find that losing your head

over trivial things is unnecessary. If you die from anger, who would feel satisfied. Moreover, it is bothersome and laborious.' "

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "I'm not angry."

Lu Wancheng beckoned to Hua Lu. Hua Lu brought her ear closer to him. "What's the matter, Young Master?"

Lu Wancheng said, "Someone's angry, but I won't tell you who it is."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"Shhhh." Lu Wancheng raised his index finger in front of his lips and looked out the window, "That mother of mine is here."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Who are you shushing? You're the one who keeps on talking. As for your mother, she's probably here to criticize me violently."

Lu Wancheng stroked his chin and said, "Let me guess, did she tell you to stick close to me but you didn't feel like paying her any attention?"

In his surprise, Lin Qingyu forgot to be angry. "How did you know?"

Lu Wancheng smiled meaningfully. "I know a lot of things."

Lin Qingyu thought for a moment, then smiled. He lifted up his sleeves and took up Lu Wancheng's bowl of half-eaten porridge. "Young Master Hou, I'll

feed you your rice porridge."

Lu Wancheng: "…eh?"

Outside, Liang Shi, with Liu momo lending her arm for support, entered the courtyard. Feng Qin greeted her and said, "Greetings, Madam."

Liang Shi asked her, "Where is the Young Master?"

"Answering Madam, the Young Master is eating in the bedroom."

"Is Shaojun with him?"

Feng Qin shook her head. "Shaojun is alone in the study."

Liu momo whispered, "Madam, you have heard it yourself. What I told you were all things that Shaojun has said."

Liang Shi straightened the hair ornament by her temples and said calmly, "I believe you. Let's go. We'll go in and take a look."

Liu momo walked lightning quick, opening the way for her mistress. "The eldest Young Master has just woken up last night. It is precisely at this time that he needs someone to wait upon him. Although there is a maid in the room, Shaojun is Shaojun, after all. With the husband laid up in bed, what reason could there be for his wife not to take care of him? This is only the first

day, and Shaojun is already neglecting him so. How is this worthy of our Lu Family's marriage…?"

Everyone knew that Nan'an Hou Mansion's madam had a gentle temperament. Yet at this moment, she too couldn't help pulling a long face as sped up her pace.

The two rushed into the inner room, almost like fire was nipping at their heels. The wedding decorations had yet to be removed. Lu Wancheng was half lying on the marriage bed. Lin Qingyu was seated beside him, holding the porridge bowl in one hand, and holding the spoonful of porridge to Lu Wancheng's mouth with the other. He called to him, "Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng laughed and said, "It's a bit hot. Blow on it first."

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes, looking like he was about to poke a hole into Lu Wancheng's smiling face.

In any case, the husbands, one handsome and luxurious, the other bright and dignified, looked nothing but joyous and harmonious. It seemed that their time together would be good and peaceful.

Liang Shi and Liu momo both stood there stunned until Lu Wancheng looked at them. "Why is Mother here?"

Liang Shi frowned but quickly relaxed her expression. She said softly, "Mother came to see how your appetite is." As she said so, she cast an almost

indiscernible glance at Liu momo.

Liu momo was utterly discomfited and she asked in a low voice, “Didn’t you say that Shaojun is in the study!”

Feng Qin said, dazed, “He-he was just in the study a moment ago.”

Lin Qingyu put down the bowl of porridge, stood up and said, “Madam just sent Liu momo here not long ago. Why would she be here again in person? Are you here to personally confirm whether Young Master Hou has had a good meal?”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “It’s so cold outside, and still my mother came to see me eat. I’m moved.”

Liang Shi forced a smile and said, “How could a mother not be concerned about her child? Wancheng, have you drank the chicken soup that Mother sent you?”

“I wanted to drink it,” Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu, “but he wouldn’t let me.”

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “It is written in a book: Only once the evil spirits are expelled, can a patient then take tonics. Young Master Hou is now physically

weak. Too strong a tonic will only be a burden on his body. This is but general knowledge. Surely, Madam knows this?"

Liang Shi's expression became even uglier. She opened her mouth, "I…"

"Naturally, Mother knows. It must be due to the negligence of her subordinates, forgetting to offer this reminder." Lu Wancheng said with a smile, "Wouldn't you say so, Liu momo?"

Liu momo looked quietly at Liang Shi. Seeing that Liang Shi refused to look at her, she understood. Bracing herself, she knelt down, "Yes, it is this servant's fault. This servant should be punished."

Without waiting for Liang Shi to speak, Lu Wancheng said, "Qingyu, how do you think she should be punished?"

"This matter concerns the Young Master Hou's health. We have no choice but to punish a little to prevent a lot. This should serve as a warning to others." Lin

Qingyu said, “According to the rules of the Hou Mansion, you should be fined three months of allowance and made to do drudgery for a month.”

Lu Wancheng nodded. “I think this will do. But what I think is of no matter. What does Mother think?”

Liang Shi forced a smile and said, “It shall be handled as Qingyu said.”

After that, Liang Shi was obviously preoccupied and after sitting around for a while, she took Liu momo with her and left. When there were only two people left in the room, Lu Wancheng asked, “How did Liu momo provoke you?”

Lin Qingyu said, “She told me twice to change my term of address.”

“Change what term of address? She asked you to call me ‘husband’?

Lin Qingyu’s face looked cold as jade. “…En.”

Lu Wancheng laughed. “Doctor Lin, you really know how to nurse a grudge.”

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes at him, “Is that funny?”

Lu Wancheng held back a smile. “Then I won’t laugh. But how did you know the rules of the Hou Mansion?”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Liu momo insisted on telling them to me. I

tried my best not to listen but I can't help it if my memory's too good."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Well, damn. She played right into your hands there."

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Salted fish Gong: My wife is so beautiful even when being a B-king

4

Chapter 4

Too many things had happened today so it wasn't until he was about to go to bed that Lin Qingyu realized that he had miscalculated — He forgot to ask someone to put up a bed in the study. He originally planned to sleep hunched

over a table in the study, but Lu Wancheng actually had Hua Lu come and invite him to sleep in the room.

Lin Qingyu came to the room, a calm expression on his face. Lu Wancheng had finished drinking the medicine and was about to go to bed. When he saw him, he smiled. “You’re here.”

Lin Qingyu asked bluntly, “What do you mean by this?”

Lu Wancheng didn’t understand, “What do you mean?”

“Didn’t you say that we don’t have to take this marriage seriously?”

“That’s right.”

“Then why do you want me to come back here to sleep?”

Lu Wancheng understood and he said with a smile, “You misunderstood. I didn’t ask you to come back here so that I could sleep with you…”

The simple and direct words made Lin Qingyu’s face go hot. “Whatever the case may be, you are still the Young Master of a noble house. Can’t you speak with a bit more dignity?”

Lu Wancheng said, assuming a very dignified tone of voice, “I didn’t ask you to come back here for me to sleep with you. After all, no matter how good-

looking you are, you are still a man and I am not a cut-sleeve."

Lin Qingyu took a deep breath and decided not to bicker with Lu Wancheng. "If you've got something to say then just say it."

"I want some of your good fortune to rub off on me." Lu Wancheng looked pensive as he said, "I feel that when I'm with you, my body feels more relaxed."

Lin Qingyu paused. "Are you serious?"

Lu Wancheng nodded. "Very serious."

The corners of Lin Qingyu's mouth moved slightly and he sneered out a "stupid". "I didn't expect you to believe in these things too."

He thought that Lu Wancheng was different from the other people in the Nan'an Hou Mansion. He had overestimated him.

"Before, I believed it even less than you do. But now, I believe it a little bit. Lu Wancheng said slowly, "Doctor Lin, do you believe that people have three

immortal souls and six mortal souls and that we transmigrate between life and death?"

Lin Qingyu resolutely said, "I don't believe it."

"Why?"

"Because I've never seen it."

"But I've seen it."

"Then you must have been mistaken."

Lu Wancheng said quietly, "Oh, I know no one believes it."

Lin Qingyu furrowed his brows, "So, you also believe the National Teacher's nonsense?"

If it hadn't been for the National Teacher coming out with those Eight Characters, the subsequent Chong Xi would have never happened. Naturally, the National Teacher's great name, was also on his Great List of Grudges.

"The National Teacher…" Lu Wancheng muttered to himself, "You've reminded me that I should find the time to go meet with this National Teacher

of the Dayu who 'has access to the Heavens and knows the ways of ghosts and gods'."

Lin Qingyu said bluntly, "You'll need to be able to get out of bed first."

Although the National Teacher has never been tainted by political affairs, he nevertheless held a very a distinguished status, comparable to descendants of the Imperial Family. He was often called by the Emperor to accompany him in

the palace. If Lu Wancheng wanted to see him, he could only beg for an audience.

Lu Wancheng returned to his senses and said, “Let’s not talk about that for now. Doctor Lin, look at the luohan bed that Hua Lu has prepared for you.”

“…What luohan?”

Lin Qingyu only then noticed that the luohan bed he had slept on last night was now covered with a thick mattress and quilt. It even had a soft pillow. It now looked no different from a small bed.

Lin Qingyu momentarily lost control over his expression. He didn’t know whether to praise or scold him.

Lu Wancheng said generously, “While I don’t mind sleeping with a man, I’m afraid you would.”

When Lin Qingyu had left home to study, he traveled with his teacher and sometimes slept on the same bed with his fellow apprentices. It wasn’t a big deal for two straight men to sleep together, but Lu Wancheng…was still his

husband in name. He simply couldn't interact with Lu Wancheng the same as he would any other man.

In any case, sleeping on a luohan was more comfortable than sleeping over a desk. And this way, it will also save him the bother of Liang Shi kicking up a fuss if she discovers that they've been sleeping in separate rooms.

Lin Qingyu took notice and said, "I'll go wash first."

As the night got deeper, the lights in the Hou Mansion went out one by one. Two newly married men, one sleeping on the bed, the other lying on the

luohan, separated by a screen embroidered with a picture of mandarin ducks playing in the water.

Lu Wancheng had slept too much during the day and he wasn't very sleepy right now. He folded his hands behind his head and chatted with Lin Qingyu, "Doctor Lin, how old are you this year?"

Lin Qingyu had his eyes closed. Not the least bit interested, he said, "Eighteen."

"From a normal perspective, you're probably a few months older than me. How about I call you 'Yu Ge' from now on?

Lin Qingyu asked, "Do you have a headache?"

Lu Wancheng paused to see if he did, "No, it doesn't hurt."

"And here I thought the sickness must have addled your brain and you forgot your own age."

"Oh? How old am I?"

Is this man stupid or just pretending to be stupid?

For the sake of one's health, it wasn't advisable to go to sleep feeling irritated. Lin Qingyu tried his best to calm down. "Nineteen."

"What luck!" Lu Wancheng smiled, "Then you call me 'Wancheng Gege'

instead."

Lin Qingyu turned over, leaving only the back of his head to Lu Wancheng. "Go to sleep, Young Master Hou. In your dreams, you can have anything."

Lu Wancheng laughed lowly. Sounding puzzled, he thought aloud to himself, "A bad-tempered beauty, such a charming character design was unexpectedly not made into the protagonist…"

The night was deep and Lin Qingyu was exhausted both physically and mentally. He allowed himself to sink into a dream.

The Dayu placed great importance on medicine. In addition to the Imperial Hospital and the Imperial Pharmacy within the palace, it also set up the Imperial Medical Office outside it to train and select medical talents. Similar to the imperial examination, the Imperial Medical Office would hold an examination every three years. Regardless of one's social status, no matter who one's teacher was, as long as they were able pass the examination, they could enter the Imperial Medical Office. There, they could read the world's most remarkable books, be awarded the world's precious materials, work together with famous doctors from within and without the Dayu; perhaps they would enter the palace, or write a book, or journey to other countries to study and do research.

The Imperial Medical Office, the holy land of healers. How many people have squeezed broken their heads trying to get in? The assessment and selection were extremely strict. It was not an exaggeration to say that it was one in ten

thousand. Lin Qingyu was extraordinarily talented with incomparable skills. His teacher once asserted that he would pass the exam with a single take. But he still didn't dare to slack off and prepared for this exam for three whole years.

It was finally the day of the exam. He and a few fellow students waited outside the examination venue. The young man was full of spirit. Having already prepared in advance, he was talking and laughing happily. In him, there wasn't the slightest bit of nervousness or apprehension seen in the others.

The vermilion door of the examination venue slowly opened, and Lin Qingyu's eyes lit up. He walked up the stairs step by step, walking towards his ideal holy land. In a moment, he was about to touch that beam of light, when a strange voice stopped him.

It was a man in eunuch's robes. Lin Qingyu couldn't see his face clearly, only the bright yellow imperial decree he was holding in his hands.

"The imperial edict is here. Lin Qingyu, please accept the decree–"

Lin Qingyu knelt down and listened to the decree. The other candidates didn't seem at all to care about this sudden change, and one by one, they walked into the examination venue, forming empty shadows behind Lin Qingyu.

"By the grace of the gods, the Emperor bestows a wedding upon Lu Wancheng, son of Nan'an Hou, of precious moral standing, of extraordinary appearance, and soon to reach weak crown and the son of Lin Zhaoxing, yuan pan of the

Imperial hospital, of commendable conduct and filial piety, and of dignified appearance. Choose an auspicious day for the big wedding. The Emperor himself so decrees."

Lin Qingyu looked up in amazement, the bright yellow light was so blinding, he could hardly open his eyes.

The doors of the Imperial Medical Office slammed shut.

…

Lin Qingyu abruptly woke up from his dream. In the silence, there was only the sound of him gasping for breath.

His rapidly beating heart gradually calmed down. But the pent up frustration and unwillingness were like thick ink stones; they could not be dissipated nor dispelled from his heart.

The dream and reality were not the same. In reality, the eunuch who passed the decree went directly to the Lin Residence, after which his qualifications to

take the exam were cancelled. Way before the day of the exam, he became the male wife of the Nan'an Hou Mansion.

There was still an hour before dawn but Lin Qingyu could no longer sleep. He got out of bed and wanted to pour himself a cup of tea, when he heard a deliberately muffled groan.

It was Lu Wancheng's voice.

Lin Qingyu lit a lamp and walked quickly to the bedside. "Young Master Hou?"

Lu Wancheng curled up on the bed, his body slightly arched, his eyes tightly closed. His face was somewhat twisted and his long hair stuck to his face with cold sweat.

Lin Qingyu called again, "Lu Wancheng?"

Lu Wancheng opened his eyes, the expression in his eyes slack, "Doctor Lin?"

"It's me."

"Doctor Lin, I feel a little uncomfortable."

Lin Qingyu felt Lu Wancheng's pulse and determined that he was the victim of heart palpitations.

"I know." Lin Qingyu said in rarely-heard gentle tone of voice, "It feels

uncomfortable on your chest, doesn't it?"

Lu Wancheng nodded.

"Bear with it. I'll be back soon."

Lu Wancheng said feebly, "Are you going to get a knife?"

Lin Qingyu could make neither head nor tail or it, "What would I do with a knife?"

" Finish off a wounded combatant?"

Lin Qingyu's tone returned to its usual indifference. "…I have no interest in killing people."

But before the wedding, he really had entertained the idea of drugging Lu Wancheng with something that would render him impotent. If it hadn't been for Lu Wancheng's good performance on their wedding night, proposing first

that he not to take the marriage seriously, Lu Wancheng might now already be halfway to becoming a eunuch.

Lin Qingyu took out a wooden medical box from his chest of clothes. Inside were a lot of his favorite creations, most of which were poisons. Of course, there were also some good medicines for healing and saving people.

Lin Qingyu returned to his bedside with a porcelain bottle and an acupuncture bag in his hand. “This is the Zhenxin Pill, which can relieve your palpitations. Would you like to take it?”

Lu Wancheng said, “Eat and live, I say.”

Lin Qingyu resisted the urge to turn around and leave. He helped Lu Wancheng up and put the Zhenxin Pill into his mouth. “Just in case, I will also pierce you with two needles.”

Lu Wancheng seemed to remember some kind of the shadow from his childhood. He held his arm and tried to get up. “You’re going to run a needle

into me?"

"It's acupuncture!"

Oh. Lu Wancheng lay back down, "Then, please be gentle."

Lin Qingyu: "I'm going to use force."

Lu Wancheng: "…"

Lin Qingyu deepened his breathing. Acupuncture was a meticulous job, and he needed to concentrate all his attention on it.

"Doctor Lin, am I going to die again already? Save my life if you can but don't force it if you can't." Lu Wancheng sighed, "I only slept for a few days and woke up naturally…"

"Shut up." Sweat was seeping from Lin Qingyus's forehead. His eyes gleamed and he focused on the first needle. "I won't let you die, at least not tonight."

After taking medicine and receiving acupuncture, Lu Wancheng's symptoms were relieved, and he soon fell back asleep. Lin Qingyu breathed a sigh of relief. He raised his eyes and looked out the window. The sky was already tainted with the grey of dawn.

The next day, the sun was already three poles high but Lu Wancheng was still not awake. Hua Lu was incessantly worried. She couldn't help from going over

to check on his breathing. Lin Qingyu saw this and said, “If you’re so free, go and sweep the yard.”

Hua Lu said, “Shaojun, Young Master has been sleeping for twelve hours. Is this really alright?”

Lin Qingyu took no notice of it. “Patients should sleep more.” But before Hua Lu could breathe out a sigh of relief, he added, “But he really does sleep a lot. Did he lack sleep before?”

Hua Lu shook her head: “No, the Young Master’s body is weak. He’s usually laid up in bed and he always sleeps whenever he feels sleepy.”

Lin Qingyu grew pensive upon hearing this.

It wasn’t until weishi that Lu Wancheng slowly woke up. Lin Qingyu was called by him to his bedside and made to accept his thanks, “Doctor Lin, I was

very fortunate to have you here last night. Otherwise, I wouldn't have even known how I died."

Seeing that his complexion looked good, Lin Qingyu didn't bother to hold back his mouth, "Naturally, you would have died of illness."

"It is a great favor that I owe you, a favor that I wouldn't be able to possibly repay. I have decided. For you, I shall do one difficult and troublesome thing."

Lin Qingyu was indifferent. "That won't be necessary. Just talk less before going to bed."

"Huh?" Lu Wancheng smiled, "Are you saying I talk too much..?."

As the two were talking, Feng Qin came in to report, "Young Master, Shaojun, the Second Young Lady is here."

Feng Qin's 'Second Young Lady' was Lu Wancheng's younger sister, whom Lin Qingyu had yet to see.

Lu Wancheng muttered to himself as he pondered, "Second Young Lady…what is she here to do?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Naturally, she's here to visit the sick–I won't bother you siblings."

Lu Wancheng grabbed his sleeves and said, "Look how impatient you are. I

didn't say I was going to see her."

Feng Qin was surprised, "Young Master isn't going to see the Second Young Lady? You've always had the best relationship. I think the Second Young Lady even brought the knee pads she made herself. She must be here to give it to the

Young Master. She already came here once yesterday. Only that when she found that Young Master was asleep, she went back first."

Lin Qingyu had no affection for the people in the Nan'an Hou Mansion. But Lu Wancheng was not him. His sister has repeatedly come to visit him. As her brother, how could he possibly turn a blind eye to it?

Lin Qingyu said, "If you don't see her this time, she will just come again next time. She's your sister, what are you hiding for?"

"I'm not hiding. I just don't feel like pretending to like them. I don't want to bother feigning civility." Lu Wancheng thought for a while and said, "How about this? Feng Qin give her my reply. Tell her to treat me as dead."

Saying so, Lu Wancheng turned over, leaving other people with the view of a lonely and stubborn back.

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Author's Note:

Based on your many years of experience reading book transmigration novels, if the Grumpy Beauty is not the protagonist of the original book, then he is—?

The big villain

Cannon fodder gong

Cannon fodder shou

A great, honorable and proper member of the protagonist's party

PS: Why do you all want the Big Beauty to quickly be widowed! The salted fish gong is going 'are you f*cking kidding me!'

5

Chapter 5

After a few days of careful nurturing, no matter his actual condition inside, Lu Wancheng improved a lot on the surface. Lin Qingyu thought he could try getting out of bed and taking a couple of steps. Lu Wancheng listened to his advice, got out of bed, and took two difficult steps. He felt weak in his limbs; he felt his whole body go soft. He lay back on the bed and said with a clear conscience, "There is nothing difficult in this world, as long as you're willing to give up. I choose to give up."

Lin Qingyu asked him, "Could it be that you plan to lie in bed for the rest of your remaining days?"

Lu Wancheng: "Is there something wrong with that?"

Lin Qingyu: "…No. Just stay lying down."

Lin Qingyu, who believed in diligent study and had a strong determination to succeed, couldn't bear to look at Lu Wancheng's half-dead appearance. He

didn't step a single foot into their room for the entire day — Out of sight, out of mind.

This was the day of a newly-wed bride's first return to her parental home.

Lin Qingyu didn't want to admit that he was a "bride", but he did miss his family. It has only been a few days since he left home, but to him, it felt like years.

Early in the morning, Liang Shi sent a steward to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Under the steward's supervision, the servants carried in two boxes of gifts, saying that Madam was letting Shaojun bring these back to his parents.

Hua Lu was still quite young and said simply what was on her mind, "What's this? There's only these two boxes? The Madam prepared more gifts when she married off a servant girl."

The steward smiled and said, "Hua Lu Guniang does not understand. The amount of gifts the bride brings back to her parents depends on how much dowry she brings in when she gets married. Shaojun brought little dowry into the mansion, so the gifts for his return to his parents is also naturally but little.

This was true. When his parents had prepared Lin Qingyu's dowry that day, he strongly demanded that there be as little as possible. It would have been best if he had brought nothing at all. He didn't take any of the rare collections or valuable porcelains prepared by his father, any of the gold and silver jewelry or

deeds to fertile land prepared by his mother. Bringing these to the Nan'an Hou Mansion would only dirty the Lin Residence's things.

Lin Qingyu knew that his parents cared nothing for these mere worldly possessions. They wished only for his safety and success. He said, "There's no need to bring even these two boxes."

The steward was taken aback, thinking that he had heard it wrong. "Shaojun means…"

"Keep it. Let the Madam use it as she wishes."

Although Hua Lu had yet to marry, even she knew that the bride's first return to her parent's house was a matter of face. She tried to persuade Lin Qingyu, "Shaojun, at least take a little bit with you. If the bride really goes back to her parent's house empty-handed, the neighbors will definitely point and gossip."

"Is the Lin Residence not already the subject of much gossip?" Lin Qingyu said lightly, "Let them gossip."

In the current dynasty, male homosexuality was in vogue. Most all houses of high-ranking officials and nobles kept several male concubines. Even His Majesty's harem had one or two male concubines. But when all was said and

done, a man was a man, unable to have children; and so, he could not be made a proper wife.

Dayu's law states that for every man, a woman; one husband, one wife and many concubines. If it weren't for the sake of saving Lu Wancheng's life, and the words of the National Teacher, His Majesty would not have gone against established tradition and bestowed marriage upon two men.

Lin Qingyu was the first man given to another man in marriage by the Emperor. This alone was enough to make the small Lin Residence famous throughout the capital, becoming the topic of idle conversation over a cup of tea by the rich and powerful in the capital.

The steward felt apprehensive in his heart. He heard Lin Qingyu ask him, "Is the carriage ready?"

"It is ready. There is one more thing, the Madam has tasked me with telling Shaojun." The steward cleared his throat and said, "The Madam said, the Young Master has yet to completely recover and it is cold outside. She is afraid the Young Master may not be able to stand it. And so, there will be no need for the Young Master to accompany Shaojun on his return to his parent's house."

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Don't worry. I never planned on taking him with me either."

Lin Qingyu got into the carriage alone. The Nan'an Hou Mansion and the Lin Residence was separated by more than half of the entire capital. A trip to there

and back would take half a day.

When passing Yongxing Street, Lin Qingyu stopped the driver and said, “Wait here.”

Yongxing Street was the most prosperous street in the capital. Both sides of the street were full of shops: silk cloth shops, porcelain shops, wine shops and tea houses, etc. Lin Qingyu walked into a wine shop and ordered two pots of their best quality Nu’er Hong. He then went to the neighboring pastry shop to buy a few jins of candied fruit. Bringing just these home was enough.

The Lin Residence knew that Lin Qingyu would be going home today, and they had their doors open since early in the morning. When the hour was near, Mother Lin took her young son, and the young page who had followed Lin Qingyu since they were children to stand at the gate of the house and wait.

Seeing that he was about to arrive home soon, Lin Qingyu pushed open the window of the carriage. From a distance, he could see a little child bouncing up and down, waving his arms and rushing to the carriage.

This was his six-year-old brother, Lin Qinghe.

Lin Qingyu’s heart, stretched taut for many days, finally relaxed a bit.

Lin Qingyu stepped out of the carriage, and his younger brother jumped into his arms. “Gege!” Lin Qinghe was at the age when his baby teeth were falling

out. His two of front teeth were missing and there would be a whistling sound when he talked.

“Young Master!” His page, Huan Tong, simply could not contain his excitement, as though his master wasn’t coming back from Nan’an Hou Mansion, but rather, from the battlefield.

Lin Qingyu rubbed his brother’s head, and looked at the sweet-tempered lady standing to the side. “Mother.”

Mother Lin said with tears in her eyes, “It’s good that you’re back.” She looked at the carriage and was quite nervous, “Is Young Master Hou still in the carriage?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Young Master Hou is laid up in bed and it was not advisable for him to go out. He said that we should regard him as dead.”

Mother Lin looked shocked. “This…”

Lin Qingyu smiled soothingly, “Let’s not mention others at home — Where is Father?”

“A student of your father’s came to visit today. He is receiving the guest in the

hall."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Which student?"

Mother Lin said, "Tan Qizhi."

Lin Qingyu's smile became restrained. "He sure knows how to pick a day." Coming neither early nor late; he simply insisted on coming right on the day that he was scheduled to return home.

The Tan Family ran the largest pharmacy in the capital. Tan Qizhi was one of Father Lin's outer disciples. It could be said that he shared some bit of friendship with Lin Qingyu. But that bit of friendship aside, if Lin Qingyu had his way, he wouldn't want to interact with this person too much. This person was always looking to one-sidedly compete and compare with others. He did it so often that people simply grew fed up with him. Compared with Tan Qizhi, even Lu Wancheng would appear lovable.

In any case, that Lu Wancheng didn't come made Mother Lin breathe out a sigh of relief. She and her husband only missed their son. If their son-in-law

came as well, their entire family would be very reserved. “Let’s not all stand here at the door. Let’s go in. Mother has prepared your favorite plum cake.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Did Mother make it herself?”

Mother Lin smiled, “Naturally, not as though you’d eat it if it were made by anyone else.”

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. The piercing chill surrounding his whole body seemed to have turned into a gust of spring breeze. The Hou Mansion

coachman who had been driving the carriage was stunned–Was this their Shaojun who ignored everyone and kept a frosty look all day long?

As soon as Lin Qingyu entered the door, he saw Tan Qizhi approaching, "Qingyu Xiong, you're finally here!"

Tan Qizhi appeared upright and proper, of a bookish nature. At first glance, he looked like a talented young man.

Lin Qingyu gave a careless nod to Tan Qizhi. He then gave a salute to the man in charge. "Father."

Father Lin couldn't be like Mother Lin, who showed her utter happiness on her face. A light merely flickered in his eyes. "You're back."

Tan Qizhi looked out the door and asked, "Why are you alone? What about Young Master Hou?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "He didn't come."

Tan Qizhi's face wore a look of surprise. "I've never seen a bride return to her parent's house without her husband."

"Is that so? Well, now, you've seen it."

Father Lin said, considerately, "I think it's because Young Master Hou has yet

to heal from his illness. It is inadvisable for him to go out."

Even if he were still sick and was advised against going out, why was there not even a courtesy letter?

Tan Qizhi unabashedly sized up Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu wore plain white clothes today. He was already naturally thin, with a breeze flowing into his sleeves and a thin waist as though bound with a belt. Beautiful was beautiful, but it was too extreme. A male wife set so high on up, how could his husband look favorably upon him?

He more or less understood. Lin 'The Great Beauty' Qingyu has failed to win the favor of his husband and his husband's family.

"Qingyu Xiong, sure enough, is still as magnificent as ever. His appearance would not lose out to any woman." Tan Qizhi said with a smile, "However, you now belong to the Young Master of the Hou Mansion. Why do they still dress so plainly?"

Lin Qingyu swept his eyes up and down Tan Qizhi. "Naturally, I can't compare with Tan Xiong. Tan Xiong has on bright purple clothes and even an ornament around his waist. You are simply oozing extravagance. Why, who could look more like the male wife of a wealthy family than you?"

Tan Qizhi's face twisted but he quickly brought back his previous expression. "Qingyu Xiong jests. But speaking of wealthy families… What of Qingyu

Xiong's gifts for his return? Quickly take it out and let your brother see the wealth of a noble house."

Lin Qingyu picked up the two pots of Nu'er Hong. "Here."

When Father Lin saw this, he shared a smile with his son.

Tan Qizhi stared, "This… just this?" Even if Lin Qingyu has fallen out of favor, he was still the formally and legally married male wife of the Hou Mansion. How could his return gift be so shabby?

"There's also a few jins of candied fruit," Lin Qingyu said lightly. "Would Tan Xiong care to have a taste?"

Lin Qinghe heard that there was candied fruit, and said excitedly: "I want to eat candied fruit. Thank you, Gege."

Tan Qizhi used a joking tone to say, "Could it be possible that Qingyu Xiong has hidden all the good things? Don't you want to give it to Teacher and his wife?"

Father Lin said, "I think these are very good already. My good wife, please take the wine to warm it up. Qingyu, Qizhi and I will have a few drinks later."

Tan Qizhi said, embarrassed, "Teacher, I'm afraid this is not in compliance

with customs."

Father Lin asked, "How so?"

Tan Qizhi seemed as though he were reluctant to say it, "Qingyu Xiong is already someone's wife. How could he possibly share the same table with me, a male outsider?"

Father Lin's expression sank. Even though his eldest son had an astoundingly beautiful face and has married into a noble family as a man, he still regarded him as man through and through. But others may not think so. The Nan'an Hou Mansion had strict rules. Whether a male wife could see a male outsider was already open to question, let alone drinking at the same table.

"It is certainly not in compliance." Lin Qingyu appeared calm and unperturbed, but in fact, he was already thinking of what poison would be worthy of Tan Qizhi's mouth, "Then Tan Xiong, what are you still doing here? Take care, we won't bother seeing you out."

Tan Qizhi was too surprised to utter a word. He obviously had yet to see a good show and he didn't want to leave just yet. He gave a hollow laugh and

said, “To tell you the truth, aside from paying my respects to the Master, I came here to visit to ask for one thing…”

Before he could finish speaking, a steward hurriedly said, “Master, Madam, your son-in-law is here!”

Lin Qingyu said coldly, “What son-in-law? What nonsense is this?”

“It’s Young Master Hou!” said Huan Tong, who had followed behind the steward. “Young Master Hou of the Nan’an Hou Mansion is here!”

What was Lu Wancheng doing out of bed at this hour? What did he come to the Lin Residence for?

Lin Qingyu packed away his moodiness. “I’ll go take a look.”

Father Lin said solemnly, “We’ll go too.”

When all was said and done, Lu Wancheng’s status was that of a noble’s. If they do not go out to welcome him, and they offend him, if news of it were to be passed on to the Nan’an Hou Mansion as gossip from people with ulterior

motives, they were afraid that Lin Qingyu's situation would become even more difficult.

Tan Qizhi rolled his eyes and he followed them out.

As soon as Lin Qingyu arrived in the courtyard, he saw Lu Wancheng sitting in a wheelchair, being pushed in by a male servant.

The two locked eyes with each other.

Lu Wancheng curved his lips and smiled. Sure enough, he was made of orchids and jade trees, a modest gentleman. "Qingyu, you went back to the Lin Resident but didn't take me with you." Seeing Lin Qingyu's touching expression, he lowered his voice and said, "What's this? Why are you angry again?… How can you still be angry in your own home?"

During the past few days, some color had been coaxed into appearing on Lu Wancheng's face. But his complexion was still paler than that of ordinary people's. He was holding an exquisite heating stove in his hands. He had on a crimson robe, a snow cape draped on his shoulders, and a snow-white fox fur robe laid over his lap. And yet, he did not appear the least bit bloated. On the

contrary, he appeared handsome and luxurious. His jade-like quality and gold-like appearance was made all the more prominent.

When Lu Wancheng lay paralyzed on the bed, he looked exactly like salted fish. Out of bed,…he was a dog dressed as a man.

Before Lin Qingyu could speak, his parents had already come out. Lu Wancheng turned his eyes slightly, and the servant behind him readily took the hint. He took the heater and fox fur in one hand, and supported Lu Wancheng with the other. Once Lu Wancheng was steady on his feet, he bowed to Father

Lin and Mother Lin, saying, “Greetings to Father-in-law and Mother-in-law. Your son-in-law has arrived late.”

Graceful and poised, with a natural manner that befitted the situation, he had exactly the bearing that a noble son should have.

Lin Qinghe hid behind his brother, staring at Lu Wancheng with wide eyes. “Gege, this person looks good.”

Lin Qingyu looked on coldly, “Your eyes are playing tricks on you.”

Father Lin said, “There is no need to be polite, Young Master Hou. You are unwell, please sit.”

Lu Wancheng got back into the wheelchair, his eyes falling on Tan Qizhi. “And this is?”

“Greetings, Young Master Hou.” Tan Qizhi stepped forward and said respectfully, “I am Tan Qizhi, a student of Lin Yuan Pan. The ‘Ever Bright and Harmonious Medicine Shop’ in the capital is run by my family.”

A smile appeared at the corner of Lu Wancheng’s lips. “En? Ever what and

Harmonious?”

Tan Qizhi hurriedly said, “Ever Bright and Harmonious.”

Lu Wancheng asked again, “What Bright and Harmonious?”

Tan Qizhi had a vague feeling that he was being played with. Nevertheless, the identity of the other party was not ordinary, so no matter how he was being

tricked, he could only greet him with a smile, “It’s Ever Bright and Harmonious.”

“Ever Bright and what?”

…This was all ‘what and what’.

Lin Qingyu interrupted the two of them. “The wind out here is chilly. Father, Mother, go into the house. You can leave Young Master Hou to me.”

Mother Lin stretched out her hand towards Lin Qinghe. “Qinghe, don’t always stick to your brother. Come here to Mother.”

After his parents left, Lin Qingyu asked Lu Wancheng quietly, “Did you take the wrong medicine?”

Now that he was talking alone with Lin Qingyu, Lu Wancheng didn’t bother pretending. His brows drooped low and a tired expression appeared on his face. “I’m here to support you, Doctor Lin.”

“There’s no need for that.” When something unusual happens, it means that there must be something fishy going on. Lin Qingyu frowned, “You don’t usually get up at this hour.”

“That’s right. I had to try hard so many times before I was able to successfully get out of bed.” Lu Wancheng smiled, “I did this for you, to repay you for giving

me medicine and applying acupuncture. How is it? Were you moved?"

Lin Qingyu said in a cool tone of voice, "No."

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows. "Then, should I go?"

Lin Qingyu pondered it for a short moment and said, "You may as well. Find an excuse and go back to the Hou Mansion."

Lu Wancheng choked and suddenly felt that the world simply wasn't worth it. "…That's just too much, Xiongdi."

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Salted fish Gong: God! And I even actually got up early for him…

6

Chapter 6

Lu Wancheng's expression revealed enormous grievance, as though he had gone up a mountain of swords, down into a sea of fire, suffered through untold dangers and hardships to come to the Lin Residence.

Seeing it, Lin Qingyu wanted to laugh. Lu Wancheng just got up an hour earlier than usual, left the house and got onto a carriage. He then got out of the carriage and sat on a wheelchair — what was there to feel wronged over?

Having Tan Qizhi was already bad enough. And just as he was about to drive him out, Lu Wancheng just had to come join in the fun. He just wanted to have a good meal with his family. Why was it so difficult?

Seeing that Lin Qingyu was unmoved, Lu Wancheng was compelled to feel relieved. Lu Wancheng had come, he'd even brought gifts and he'd pretended to be a little serious, which gave Lin Qingyu a lot of face. He had probably already repaid Lin Qingyu for giving him the medicine and acupuncture

treatment. Going back home to sleep sounded good too. Also, it was really cold outside and it was tiring to pretend to be good.

Lu Wancheng shrugged, “Alright, then I’ll say that something urgent came up.”

Before Lin Qingyu could reply, a little head poked out from the inner room. “Gege, why aren’t you coming in yet?”

Lin Qinghe asked, casting a curious look at Lu Wancheng. Lu Wancheng smiled back at him.

Lin Qingyu said, “We’re coming”. He then said to Lu Wancheng: “Then, you…”

Lu Wancheng said, “According to the etiquette, shouldn’t I go bid good-bye to your parents?”

Lin Qingyu snorted coldly, “Aren’t you the expert on etiquette? Why are you still asking me?”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “Hearing Doctor Lin say that, it seems that my acting just now was pretty good.”

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng into the house. The Lin Family had already reserved a place for Lu Wancheng.

The charcoal brazier is burning in the hall, it was a lot warmer than outside without making people feel oppressed. The fragrance of wine was diffused

into the air and two winter bamboo bonsais were placed in the corners, adding a sense of elegance and freshness. The Lin Family's tastes leaned towards mild and the dishes on the table were mainly lightly flavored ones. There was also a plate of white cakes interspersed with light red; it looked like ardent red and white plums intertwined in one spot. Lu Wancheng couldn't help glancing repeatedly at it.

Father Lin said, "Young Master Hou, please, over here."

Lu Wancheng paused and said with a smile, "I won't be joining you for this meal. I'm here to bid goodbye to Father-in-law and Mother-in-law."

"Oh?" Tan Qizhi glanced at Lin Qingyu, his eyes filled with deep meaning. "Why is Young Master Hou leaving right after he has just arrived? And without even having eaten any food."

Lu Wancheng let out a couple of muffled coughs and said, "I'm afraid I won't be able to hold on for long. I must go back and lie down…It is a most laughable situation."

Mother Lin said, "It will take a couple of hours to get to the Nan'an Hou Mansion from here. The carriage would bump and jolt on the road. It would

be better for Young Master Hou to rest here first and then set off once you're feeling better."

Lu Wancheng said, sounding embarrassed, "This… Qingyu, what do you think?"

Lin Qingyu looked at the somewhat joking look in Lu Wancheng's eyes.

Lu Wancheng hadn't used a last-minute emergency as his excuse. Rather, he said he felt unwell and wanted to go back to rest. Anyone with a brain could see his intentions.

This was the Lin Residence. His father was the yuan pan of the Imperial Hospital. Although the post was not high, he was still a member of the Emperor's inner ministerial circle. He was in charge of taking care of the Son of Heaven, of the Empress and of the Imperial concubines within the palace. There was no need to doubt his medical expertise. To say that he was the best

doctor within Dayu would not be an overstatement. Saying that you are unwell in front of him was already a clear indication.

Lin Qingyu saw through through his plan but didn't expose him. "It's up to you."

Only then did Lu Wancheng say, "Then, I accept for deference is no substitute for obedience."

Before taking his seat, Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng to the side to wash his hands. He said, "After dinner, let my father examine your pulse for you."

Lu Wancheng found this to be inessential. "That's not necessary. I'm terminally ill, there's no cure for this."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Don't pretend. Isn't this what you stayed for?"

Lu Wancheng washed his hands slowly, and said calmly, "No, I just want to have a taste of the plum cake. It looks delicious and I'm a little hungry."

Were it anyone else, Lin Qingyu would never have believed this kind of nonsense. But he actually believed that what Lu Wancheng said was true. For a lazybones, save for sleeping, eating was naturally the most important.

Lin Qingyu turned around and saw that Tan Qizhi was still there. He no longer felt up to going round the curves and skirting corners with him. He said

bluntly, “You can’t drink at the same table with me, right? Then why have you not left yet?”

Tan Qizhi seemed to have been prepared for a long time. He smiled. “Today I have had the honor to witness Young Master Hou’s graceful demeanor with my own eyes. I personally think that Young Master Hou’s noble and benevolent character, his broad-mindedness, sets him apart from some of the more pedantic sort and would not be so strict with Qingyu Xiong. I merely wish to offer a few glasses of wine to salute the Teacher. Young Master Hou surely wouldn’t mind?”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “Of course. We are all men here. There is no need to be so restrictive.”

Lin Qingyu swept a cold glance at Lu Wancheng, regretting that he hadn’t stuck a few more needles in him when he’d given him acupuncture that night. This man was unable to accomplish anything but liable to spoil everything. Lu Wancheng was very skilled at looking for trouble for him.

Before Tan Qizhi could take his seat, Lu Wancheng suddenly asked, “Is Tan Xiong perhaps already married?”

Tan Qizhi said, “Answering Young Master Hou, I have already been married three years.”

Lu Wancheng let out an “Ah” and said regretfully, “Then would your wife not be angry if she were to find out that you had been drinking at the same table

with us?"

Everyone around the table looked helplessly at each other. Tan Qizhi asked, puzzled, "Why would my wife be angry?"

Lu Wancheng said, "You would be drinking at the same table with a male wife and a man who has married a male wife. This does not seem to be in compliance with customs."

Lin Qingyu glanced at him, only to feel that evil tricks were brewing in this man's eyes.

Tan Qizhi could hardly keep the smile from falling off his face. "Young Master Hou jests. How could my wife be angry over this?"

"We cannot be certain of that." Lu Wancheng chuckled lightly, "For the harmony of Tan Xiong's home, in my opinion, it is best to forget about partaking wine with us today. Next time, next time surely."

Lu Wancheng's dismissal of the guest was so obvious that even the six-year-old Lin Qinghe could hear it, let alone these adults. Lin Qinghe raised his head and asked Mother Lin, "Mother, is this person leaving?"

Mother Lin said awkwardly, "This…"

Tan Qizhi prided himself on being a scholar. With how embarrassing the scene has become, no matter how thick-skinned he was, he was left with no choice

but to find a graceful exit for himself. “Today is Qingyu Xiong’s first visit to his family after his marriage. It really is a bit improper for an outsider like me to be here. I shall take my leave first, and come to visit Teacher and Young Master Hou some other day.”

Father Lin didn’t have him stay and ordered Huan Tong to the guest out.

Tan Qizhi walked to the door and heard Lu Wancheng’s voice floating from behind, “I almost forgot. Qingyu left in such a hurry today that he forgot to take with him the five carriages of gifts. Fortunately, I discovered it in time and ordered someone to bring it along. Right now, the carriages are stopped at the gate of the Lin Residence.”

Tan Qizhi gritted his teeth and tore off the jade pendant around his waist.

According to seniority, Father Lin sat at the head of the table. Mother Lin took the seat next to him. Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng sat together. They were the very picture of newlyweds, a young married couple joined at the hip. They were gathered close together, one whispering softly and the other listening, looking as though they were speaking confidences that they could not allow

outsider to hear. Seeing this, Mother Lin and Father Lin exchange a complicated look.

Others, though, could hardly have imagined that their dialogue went like this:

Lin Qingyu: “Who asked you to bring those things here. Take them back later.”

Lu Wancheng: “I know you think that the things from the Nan’an Hou Mansion are dirty, but these things can be sold for money. Why put yourself at odds with money? Wouldn’t it be fun to see them weeping and wailing over my

grave when I die and you take the Lu Family's money to eat delicious food, drink hard liquor, and live in a plush house with your concubine?"

Lin Qingyu imagined this scene for a moment. He narrowed his eyes, turned his head and ordered the servant. "Tell someone to move those things into the house."

Lu Wancheng happily stretched out his hand to grab the plum cake he's long been salivating over. "That's right."

After the meal, Father Lin took the initiative to say, "I have heard a little about Young Master Hou's condition. If Young Master Hou finds me trustworthy, may I be allowed to take a look?"

Lu Wancheng put on a pleasantly surprised expression, "It would be my pleasure."

Father Lin nodded and said, "Then Young Master Hou, please come with me."

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng to Father Lin's study. After Father Lin washed his hands, he took out a wrist cushion made of a warm jade and placed it under Lu Wancheng's wrist. He closed his eyes to probed his pulse.

For a while, the room was silent. Nothing could be made out from Father Lin's expression. After exploring his veins, Father Lin asked Lu Wancheng a few

more questions, and Lu Wancheng answered them one by one.

Father Lin said, “The root of Young Master Hou’s disease is innate. It is easy to treat the symptoms but difficult to cure the root cause. You must recuperate carefully. Avoid any mental or physical stress.”

Father Lin’s words were ambiguous, but they were nothing more than platitudes. Lu Wancheng, unexpectedly, didn’t ask much. He simply showed a tired smile and said, “Sorry to have bothered Father-in-law.”

“The guest room has been prepared. Young Master Hou can go to take a nap.” Father Lin said, “Qingyu, stay for a bit.”

Lin Qingyu nodded, and let the servant push Lu Wancheng out first.

Once Lu Wancheng had left, Father Lin asked, “Have you examined Young Master Hou’s illness?”

“I have.”

“And what are your thoughts?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Lu Wancheng is already lucky to have reached nineteen years old. Now he is hanging on by a breath. Once this breath dissipates, that will be the end of him.”

Father Lin nodded in agreement and asked, “How much time do you estimate

he still has?"

"Half a year."

Father Lin pondered for a long time and said, "I have a method that may save his life for a year. But the side effects are so great that it may aggravate the patient's pain."

Lin Qingyu said without taking the time to think it through, "What method?"

"I will write the prescription for you later." Father Lin looked into Lin Qingyu's eyes, "The question is, do you want him to live for half a year more."

Was there any need to ask? The sooner Lu Wancheng died, the sooner he would be free. Half a year was long. He didn't have the patience to wait for half a year.

So, naturally, he… didn't want to.

Lin Qingyu absently walked out of the study. He came face to face with Mother Lin who was on her way to give Father Lin his after-meal tea and cake.

Mother Lin told him that Lu Wancheng was already resting in the guest room.

“Are you going to see him?” Mother Lin asked.

Lin Qingyu said, “No, let him rest.”

Mother Lin hesitated and asked, “Qingyu, Young Master Hou… Is he being good to you?”

“It doesn’t matter whether he’s good or bad,” Lin Qingyu said lightly, “After all, it’s nothing more than a half-year long ill-fated relationship.”

Using his return to his home this time, Lin Qingyu was planning to take another box of medical books with him to the Nan’an Hou Mansion. When he arrived in his study, he saw Tan Qizhi and Huan Tong looking around by the gate. Frowning, he asked, “Why have you not left yet?”

Huan Tong explained, “Tan Gongzi said that his jade pendant was lost in our mansion. I am looking for it with him.”

“You should be searching by the front hall. That you have come to my study specifically, must mean that you have something to say.

Tan Qizhi did not refute, “Sure enough, there is nothing that can be hidden from Qingyu Xiong. To tell the truth, I suddenly remembered an important

matter. As it was not appropriate for me to go back and disturb you, I made use of the loss of the jade pendant to stay in the residence and wait."

Lin Qingyu loathed having to exchange with this kind of person a single word more than was necessary. "Say it."

Tan Qizhi's face showed a bitter expression. "Qingyu Xiong must also know that the Imperial Medical Office's examination is getting closer and closer and I harbor no confidence that I shall pass."

Lin Qingyu knew that Tan Qizhi wanted to touch his inverse scale and pierce his heart with a knife. He had to admit that this move was brilliant. The

Imperial Medical Office's examination has always been a thorn in his heart and the mere touch of it depressed him.

But this didn't mean that anyone could just take this matter and use it as a show of might, a display of power in front of him.

"You already failed the examination once three years ago. It's only right that you harbor no confidence."

Tan Qizhi was poked in his sore spot. He gritted his teeth and forced a smile, "For this examination, I am studying hard day and night."

Lin Qingyu praised, "The clumsy bird flies early and diligence cures clumsiness. You're doing a good job."

Tan Qizhi finally couldn't bear it. His face grew as black as the bottom of a pot.

Lin Qingyu's every word of praise seemed like ridicule. A man like Lin Qingyu, one favored by the gods, with outstanding aptitude, could never understand how much ordinary people had to pay just to catch up with him the tiniest bit.

"At least I can take the exam again this year." Tan Qizhi stared at Lin Qingyu's face, "I know that Qingyu Xiong has a vast collection of medical books. Since

you can no longer use it, why not let me borrow a few? If I am able to pass the exam in the future, you will have my deepest thanks."

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes and asked, "Can you even understand what is written in my books?" After saying so, he flicked his sleeve and turned around, "Huan Tong, see our visitor out."

In the blink of an eye, the sky grew dark. The coachman from the Hou Mansion came to inform them that it was the time to return to the mansion.

Mother Lin put the prepared snacks into the food box and had Lin Qingyu take it back. "Just now, during the meal, I saw that Young Master Hou also likes

the plum cakes, so I packed a few more. If the weather stays cold like today, the cakes won't spoil so easily even after a long time."

Lin Qingyu said, "There's probably nothing that he doesn't like to eat."

Mother Lin smiled softly, "Young Master Hou hasn't gotten up yet. You go and call him."

Lin Qingyu went to the guest room and saw that Lu Wancheng was awake, lying on the bed in a daze. He asked, "When did you wake up?"

"Half an hour ago."

"Then what are you still doing here?"

Lu Wancheng wrapped himself in the quilt, showing only his eyes to look at Lin Qingyu. Voice muffled, he said, "I'm having a lie-in. It's so cold outside, I don't want to get up. I want to be a blanket."

Lin Qingyu stopped talking nonsense. He grabbed a corner of the quilt and flung it away with force. Tone cold, he said, "I am not your personal maid, this trick won't work on me."

Lu Wancheng very slowly got up. He wasn't angry at having his quilt removed. "What trick? I wasn't using any trick on you…" He saw that there was

something wrong with Lin Qingyu's expression, he asked, "Didn't Tan Qizhi leave already? Who provoke you again?"

"No one."

Lu Wancheng blinked. "Oh."

Lin Qingyu was silent. Then he was silent again. Finally, he couldn't hold back, "Tan Qizhi is preparing for the examination of the Imperial Medical Office and he tried to borrow my books."

Lu Wancheng laughed. "That's it?"

Lin Qingyu's eyes were like knives and blades.

Lu Wancheng tried to reason with Lin Qingyu, "Tan Qizhi can't even compare to a single strand of your hair. If you take him seriously, you would be lowering your identity. Just treat him as a joke, something to tease, to have some fun with."

"How can I possibly not know that?" Lin Qingyu laughed at himself. "But a few years ago, Tan Qizhi, this mediocre person who couldn't even tell a Tian Kuizi from a Red Nut Sedge, can still take the examination of the Imperial Medical Office, while I can't. —It's ridiculous."

Lu Wancheng said helplessly, "Yes, yes, it's all the Nan'an Hou Mansion's fault. I will try to die early and let you be a widow before the Imperial Medical

Office's examination, okay?"

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and said nothing, his long and thick lashes trembling slightly.

Lu Wancheng stayed with Lin Qingyu in silence for a while. He then suddenly said with a smile, "Okay, don't get angry. Being able to go home is such a rare occasion. Cheer up a bit. Smile more, en?"

Lin Qingyu was indifferent. "I don't like to smile by nature."

"Sigh, why are you getting more and more angry? I have a nine word mantra that serves as my motto. It may be helpful to you. Do you want to hear it?"

"No."

"Just listen, it won't cost you anything."

Lin Qingyu pressed his brows. "If you're going to say it regardless then just say it. What's use of spouting so much nonsense as a preamble?"

Lu Wancheng's eyes were filled with sincerity. "Behave with integrity, try not

to compete with others."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

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Lin 'The Great Beauty' Qingyu: Everyday, I wish to live in widowhood.

7

Chapter 7

Once they finished packing up, Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng took their leave of Father Lin and Mother Lin to return to the Nan'an Hou Mansion.

Everyone in Lin Residence saw them off at the gate of the residence. Lu Wancheng got into the carriage first so that Lin Qingyu could say good-bye to his family.

Although the Lin Residence and the Nan'an Hou Mansion were both in the capital, it was not easy for the Shaojun of a noble family to go back to his natal family. According to the rules, he must at least get the permission of his husband's mother. The number of times he could visit his parents could be counted on one's fingers.

Mother Lin's eyes were rimmed in red because of her reluctance to let him go. Lin Qinghe held his brother's hand and refused to let go. However, the most emotional one was Huan Tong, who had grown up with Lin Qingyu.

When Lin Qingyu got married, Huan Tong wanted to follow him to the Nan'an Hou Mansion. For the sake of his future prospects, Lin Qingyu forced him to stay in the Lin Residence. Huan Tong had neither father nor mother. By the time he could form memories, he had already been sold to the Lin Residence. He grew up knowing only to follow the young master and to serve the young master. Without Lin Qingyu in the house, he didn't know what he

should do. He spent his days feeling muddleheaded, and he seemed to have lost his reason for living.

With much difficulty, he had endured, looking forward to Lin Qingyu's return to the residence. Now that he was leaving, tears flowed from his eyes and snot came out of his nose. He wanted so badly to follow Lin Qingyu back to the Hou's Mansion. He even asked Mother Lin to speak for him, "Right now, you don't have anyone you can trust in the Hou's Mansion. You better take Huan Tong with you. That way, your father and I can feel a little more at ease."

Lin Qingyu weighed the matter over and over. Finally, he nodded, "Huan Tong, pack up and get in the carriage."

Huan Tong burst into a smile amidst his tears.

Lin Qingyu got into the carriage and briefly told Lu Wancheng about Huan Tong's matter. Lu Wancheng gave an absent-minded smile, "This is a happy event. The Blue Wind Pavilion is now full of girls. The yin aura is too heavy."

Lin Qingyu sighed, "I just didn't want him to be trapped in the inner house like I am."

Lu Wancheng disagreed, "What's wrong with being trapped in the inner house? For a person with big ambitions like you, 'trapped' may be the right

word; but for me — Please, let me stay in the inner house my whole life, thank you .”

Lin Qingyu turned his head, “People who walk different paths cannot make plans together.”

The carriage started to move, and through the window, Lin Qingyu watched his family’s figures gradually recede in the distance.

“Goodbye, Gege.” Lin Qinghe waved his little hand. Seeing Lu Wancheng, he then plucked up his courage to said, “Goodbye, Wancheng Gege.”

Lu Wancheng smiled. “Goodbye, Little Qinghe.” Closing the carriage window, he said to Lin Qingyu, “Your brother seems to like me very much.”

Lin Qingyu nodded, “Qinghe has always had the bad habit of judging people by their appearance. I’ve thought of many ways to correct it, but it’s a pity that he still only likes to get close to people with outstanding looks.”

The corners of Lu Wancheng’s lips perked up. “It seems like I heard someone compliment me on my good looks.”

Lin Qingyu glanced at him and said, “You’re…indeed passable.” Although he couldn’t agree at all with Lu Wancheng’s behavior, he could barely deign to look upon that face of his.

Lu Wancheng was startled, as though he wasn’t expecting Lin Qingyu to praise

him. Even if Lin Qingyu himself didn't think it was praise; he was just telling the truth. Unexpectedly, at this time, Lu Wancheng, instead, became humble, "I'm overwhelmed, oh Number One Beauty."

Lin Qingyu asked: "Who's the Number One Beauty?"

"You."

Lin Qingyu frowned, "Such an assertion cannot be made. The world is so big and full of extraordinary things. Who could guarantee that they've have met all the people in the world? Since no one has, there is not means to compare."

Lu Wancheng smiled lightly and said, "Oh, but there is someone who has seen everyone in the world and she told me."

Lin Qingyu naturally wouldn't believe such nonsense, "Absurd."

Lu Wancheng's smile remained undiminished. He stroked his chin and said, "She also told me that this face of mine is, in the whole book… I mean, in the

entire Dayu, among the top five? I think it's pretty average though. It's far more inferior than my face before…"

He has started in once again on his long-winded nonsense.

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes to rest, cutting off Lu Wancheng's voice from his ears.

Barring any unforeseen incidents, Liang Shi should already know about Lu Wancheng's trip to the Lin Residence with the five carriages of gifts. He had no idea what her thoughts were about it and whether she would use this as an opportunity to pick a quarrel.

In theory, this matter had nothing to do with him and if Liang Shi wanted to look for someone, she should look for her son. However, on the surface, Liang Shi has always spoiled Lu Wancheng. It was Lin Qingyu's guess that she wouldn't look to reason things out with Lu Wancheng. Tomorrow, when Lin Qingyu goes to greet Liang Shi, he will probably be given a "friendly warning" through oblique innuendo.

Thinking of this, Lin Qingyu felt irritated.

Once they arrived at the Nan'an Hou Mansion, a sleepy Lu Wancheng was carried out of the carriage. Huan Tong pushed Lu Wancheng, following behind Lin Qingyu. He looked around him curiously. When they were nearing the

Blue Wind Pavilion, Lu Wancheng was almost awake. Yawning, he said, “It seems like we’ve gone the wrong way?”

This was clearly the way back to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Lin Qingyu said to Huan Tong: “Don’t pay attention to him. Let’s continue on.”

Lu Wancheng placed his elbow on the armrest of the wheelchair, supporting his forehead on his hand. “According to the rules, now that we’ve returned from the Lin Residence, shouldn’t we go and pay our respects to my mother before returning to our room?”

Lin Qingyu paused and looked back at him. “According to the rules, you should get up early every day and pay your respects to her but have you ever gone?”

“I haven’t.” Lu Wancheng said, using all his willpower, “All the more reason why I should go now that I’m awake.”

Lin Qingyu was suspicious. Normally, whenever Liang Shi came to visit the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lu Wancheng would either simply go through the motions and exchange a few perfunctory words with her, or says that he was unwell and that it was inconvenient to meet guests. He has never gone to pay his respects to her even once. One could very well imagine the outcome of this kind of relationship between mother and child. Today, Lu Wancheng was ill and he had been away from the house for the entire day. He had also sat inside

the carriage for a long time. He was obviously very tired. Yet at this time, he actually offered to pay his respects to Liang Shi. Could it be…

Lin Qingyu had a vague guess. He said, “Young Master Hou is very filial. Let us make our way there, then.”

The two arrived at Liang Shi’s courtyard. Liang Shi had just finished having a late-night snack. When she heart that they had come to greet her, she someone prepare some refreshments.

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng in to greet her. Seeing that Lu Wancheng’s complexion was not good, that exhaustion could be seen from the corners of his brows and eyes, she said, distressed, “Although it is only a matter of course for a husband to accompany his wife for her visit back to her parent’s house, Wansheng is ill, after all. Even if he doesn’t go, the Lin Residence would surely understand.”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “Qingyu said the same. He even set off without telling me to stop me from going. Mother, do you think he should be punished?”

Lin Qingyu raised his brows.

Lu Wancheng… Really did come for this matter.

Liang Shi looked at Lin Qingyu. Revealing no trace on her expression, she paused and said softly, “Qingyu was thinking of your health. What is there to

punish?"

Lu Wancheng chuckled and said, "Since Mother has said so, then he won't be punished. But it should not be taken as a precedent. Can you give me some time alone with Mother, Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu's feelings were complicated. "En."

Lu Wancheng chatted a bit more Liang Shi. He then seemingly inadvertently mentioned the return gifts. "Qingyu's return gifts were taken from my birth mother's dowry, so I didn't tell Mother in advance. Mother surely doesn't mind."

Liang Shi smiled. She took a sip of the tea and said: "Those were left to you by your biological mother. Naturally, how it's dealt with is up to you."

Liang Shi was not Lu Wancheng's biological mother. Lin Qingyu had heard of it earlier. Lu Wancheng's biological mother was Nan'an Hou's original spouse, the formal daughter of the capital's most influential official, Wen Guo Gong. Wen Guo Gong has two daughters, one married into the Nan'an Hou Mansion, and the other was the current Empress.

Lu Wancheng was born into the Hou's Mansion and also had a prominent maternal family. He had a promising future. It was a pity that his biological mother died due to excessive bleeding during the difficult delivery. Related to

his premature birth, he was born frail and sickly, and was judged at birth, to not live past twenty.

Nan'an Hou loved his eldest son dearly and exhausted all efforts to treat him. He didn't dare to train him as strictly as one would a normal legitimate heir. Later, in order to have someone manage the affairs of the mansion, he married Liang Shi as his second wife and became the father to a daughter and another son.

Lu Wancheng had been raised next to the Liang Shi since he was a child and Liang Shi put him first in everything. Though she was not his biological mother, she was even better than a biological mother. — At least, this was how the matchmaker put it to Lin Qingyu before he got married.

After returning Liang Shi's place, Lu Wancheng was almost at his limit. After taking his medicine, he lay down flat on the bed. Lin Qingyu also rested on the

luohan. The two were still separated by the screen with the mandarin ducks playing in the water.

Lin Qingyu thought back on all the things that happened today and couldn't help asking, "Young Master Hou, are you asleep?"

Lu Wancheng's voice came from behind the screen, "Not yet. Why, care to have a nighttime talk by candlelight with me?"

Lin Qingyu said slowly, "Actually, you're not a fool."

"Of course, I'm not." Lu Wancheng said with a laugh. "What were you thinking? When I was studying, I always got first place."

Lin Qingyu didn't believe it. "Could a bag of lazybones like you even get first place?"

Lu Wancheng's voice was fading, "En…being tired of learning and getting first place aren't in conflict."

"How do you figure that?"

"There are some things that I hate to do, but I know that doing it would bring me benefits. So I force myself to do them. This is the case with studying. This was also the case with paying my respects."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while, and then asked, "But you've been laid up in

bed since you were born, so how could you have had the chance to study with others?"

Lin Qingyu waited for a while, but when he didn't hear a response from Lu Wancheng, he knew that he had fallen asleep.

Past the first month, the days were getting warmer; winter, the most difficult time for the patient, was finally over. As the days warmed up, Lu Wancheng's body was obviously getting better. He didn't need to rely on a wheelchair to get in and out. Aside from sleeping, he also liked taking a walk with his pet birds, he liked looking at the flowers, touhu, watching plays…In short, he liked all things fun that didn't need him to move.

On this day, Lin Qingyu was in the study, dispensing medicine according to the prescription. The prescription was the one written by his father the day of his visit. He wanted to figure out the theory behind it. As for whether to use it for Lu Wancheng, he hadn't decided yet. In this prescription, several of the ingredients were toxic and would cause extra pain to the patient after taking them. He wondered if there were other relatively milder ingredients that could replace them…

A crisp bird cry interrupted Lin Qingyu's thoughts. This sound was mellow and pleasant to listen to. It would be a pleasure to listen to it during his leisure time. But hearing it when he was trying to concentrate was annoying.

Lin Qingyu didn't want to bother with it at all. He closed his eyes and tried to engross himself in his work. But the bird cry was incessant. Top it off with the

bursts of laughter and Lin Qingyu couldn't bear it anymore. He got up and opened the window, and said coldly to a certain someone who was taking his pet bird out for a walk, "Young Master Hou, please control your bird."

Lu Wancheng heard his voice and looked back. He had a golden birdcage in his hand. Besides Huan Tong, he was surrounded by a group of orioles and swallows, all little maids of the Blue Wind Pavilion, attracted by the singing of the Hwamei in the birdcage. Behind him was a golden peach blossom tree that had bloomed early.

"It's Doctor Lin," Lu Wancheng talked to him through the window. The spring breeze blew, and his tail end of his tone was full of smiles, "Would you like to play with my bird?"

Lu Wancheng's face was still morbidly pale, emaciated and bony. He had a lazy and casual bearing, with a handsome-ness akin to tipsy elegance. However, it gave Lin Qingyu the sense of a different kind of breath.

He had the inexplicable feeling that Lu Wancheng shouldn't have this 'too weak to even stand up against the wind' kind of look. Rather, he should be a

young man ” lying low on horseback, with a storey full of red sleeves beckoning.”

“I’m busy.” Lin Qingyu said, “Can you keep the noise down?”

Lu Wancheng said, “I’m sorry. But you’ve been locked away in the study for most of the day already. You should take a break.”

Huan Tong agreed, “That’s right, Young Master. The sun feels so good today. You can come listen to the bird singing with us.”

“The pursuit of petty pleasures thwarts high aims. Sorry, I won’t be able to keep you company.” Lin Qingyu finished speaking and closed the window with a slam.

Lu Wancheng said regretfully, “Your Young Master can be really boring sometimes.”

Huan Tong and Lu Wancheng were playing together, but he still kept his family’s young master firmly at the top of his heart. “That’s because we’re in

the Hou's Mansion. When he was in the Lin Residence, the Young Master wasn't like this."

Lu Wancheng thought that of how Lin Qingyu had followed his mentor to study away from home for many years, and said, "You're right." After that, he smiled again, "But even if he is dull and boring, I think…"

Before he could finish his words, a violent crash suddenly came from the study. Everyone hurriedly pushed the door and entered, only to see Lin

Qingyu leaning against the bookshelf, with several medical books scattered around, along with a fallen wooden stool.

Huan Tong said anxiously, “Young Master, are you okay?”

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “I’m fine. I just accidentally stepped on air when I was putting down the book.” He looked very uncomfortable when he saw so many people crowding around the door, “Have you all nothing to do?”

Lu Wancheng supported his arm and said with a smile, “Don’t be shy. A falling beauty is still beautiful.”

“I didn’t fall. I just sprained my ankle.” Lin Qingyu couldn’t help letting out a low groan when the sharp pain hit, “Help me to the bedroom. There’s medicine there.”

“How can you walk like this?” Lu Wancheng said, “I’ll carry you there.”

Lin Qingyu said in surprise, “You…”

What has gotten into Lu Wancheng? Has he suddenly forgotten about his weak body?

Lu Wancheng slid his hand to his waist and took him up into is arms.

With this embrace, Lu Wancheng’s face changed slightly and his body shook abruptly. He narrowly missed toppling over along with the person in his arms.

Fortunately, Huan Tong was beside him to hold him steady.

Lin Qingyu turned pale from the pain. “I’m begging you. Don’t toss me about anymore.”

Lu Wancheng has never been as flustered as he was now. “I’m not…”

“I’ll do it, Young Master Hou! I’m strong!”

Lu Wancheng watched as Huan Tong easily carried Lin Qingyu on his back and quickly ran to the bedroom. He suddenly gave a low laugh and said, “Damn it.”

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Are you even still a man if you can’t even carry your wife? [Laughing Loudly.jpg]

8

Chapter 8

Huan Tong carried Lin Qingyu back into the room and placed him on the luohan. Lin Qingyu then asked him to take out the medicine box from the cabinet and look for the medicine for bruises and sprains. Hua Lu saw that Lin

Qingyu was in so much pain that he was bursting out in a cold sweat. She said anxiously, “Should I go look for a doctor for Shaojun?”

Huan Tong took off Lin Qingyu’s shoe and said, “What nonsense are you saying? My family’s Young Master is the best doctor there is.”

Lin Qingyu poured the potion onto his palm and rubbed it on the sprained part. The light medicinal fragrance spread through the room.

Hua Lu said, “Shaojun, should I help you rub it? I can massage it for you.”

“No need.” Lin Qingyu endured the pain, “Go and get a basin of well water. Then soak a handkerchief in it. I still have to apply a cold compress for half an hour after using the medicine.”

Lin Qingyu rubbed the injured part. He then suddenly felt that the room was too quiet — Where was that person who talked the most?

Lin Qingyu raised his head and saw Lu Wancheng sitting by the table; his expression dark and unhappy.

Thinking about how Lu Wancheng almost fell, Lin Qingyu asked him, “Are you

bruised anywhere?"

Lu Wancheng shook his head and said, "Is your injury okay?"

"It's nothing serious. It should be all better after resting it for three days."

Lu Wancheng smiled. "That's good."

Lin Qingyu said dully, "Originally, I only had to rest my sprain for two days. But then you dropped me like that…"

Lu Wancheng hid his face, feeling pained. "Don't say it. It's my fault."

In order to make up for his fault, Lu Wancheng generously gave up his wheelchair to Lin Qingyu. However, Lin Qingyu didn't appreciate the gesture. He simply had Huan Tong serve him by his side. He had Huan Tong fetch whatever he needed. When walking was unavoidable, he had Huan Tong support him as he did so.

Hua Lu was waiting for Lu Wancheng to drink the medicine when she caught sight of Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu was slowly walking with one hand on the table and Huan Tong supporting him on his other side. He had on a simple

white robe, with his long hair falling on his shoulders and his brows furrowed slightly. The image he made caused pity to rise in Hua Lu's little girl's heart.

Lu Wancheng asked, drawing out his words, "Does he look good?"

Hua Lu nodded honestly, "He does! An injured Shaojun looks different from how he usually is."

Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu and drank the terribly bitter medicine in one go. "This is called ' battle-damaged beauty '."

Once night fell, Lin Qingyu lay on the luohan, reading as usual. Sounds of a body turning over could be heard from time to time on the big bed behind the screen. The noise made it impossible for Lin Qingyu to read at ease. Normally,

Lu Wancheng would already be dead asleep at this time. He had no idea what had gotten into the other today.

Hearing another sigh, Lin Qingyu asked, “Young Master Hou, indifferent to fame and fortune, taking no account of gains or losses, what could possible make you frown with worry and moan and groan so late into the night?”

After a period of silence, Lu Wancheng’s figure, slowly sitting up, appeared against the screen. In a miserable and desolate tone, he said, “I can’t even f*cking…carry you?”

Lin Qingyu: “…” Was Lu Wancheng losing sleep over this kind of thing?

Lu Wancheng said quietly, “This is more terrifying than a ghost story.”

These words roused Lin Qingyu’s curiosity. “Where did you get the confidence to think that you could carry me.”

Lu Wancheng couldn’t understand, “Your waist is so thin. You definitely don’t weigh that much. How could I possibly not carry you?”

Lin Qingyu didn’t feel like attending to Lu Wancheng’s inexplicable ego. He said frankly, “With the body you have now, just walking for too long leaves you

gasping for breath. Hua Lu is stronger than you. Young Master Hou, people should know their own limits."

"It's infuriating." Lu Wancheng pounded the bed repeatedly, "Even Huan Tong can do it, but I can't?"

"Huan Tong has been doing heavy work for many years. In what aspect do you think you're better?"

Lu Wancheng angrily got out of bed. In passing, he draped the fox fur robe over his shoulders and walked out from behind the screen. "I am taller than him."

Lin Qingyu put down the book and looked at him. "Young Master Hou."

"What?"

Lin Qingyu perfectly imitated Lu Wancheng's tone, "Behave with integrity, try not to compete with others."

Lu Wancheng was momentarily at a loss for words. He had completely lost the power to refute. Lin Qingyu's lips couldn't help curling up seeing his defeated expression.

Actually, Lin Qingyu smiled a lot, but most of the time it was a bitter smile or a

sneer. It was the first time Lu Wancheng saw him with a smile like this.

Lin Qingyu was half lying on the luohan, under the dim lights, with his long strands of hair hanging down on his chest, holding a book in his hand, shaking off all wariness and indifference, and smiling as he quietly watched him.

Lu Wancheng suddenly understood what was meant by "beauty is in bone-deep, not skin-deep." He couldn't help lowering his voice, for fear of disturbing Lin Qingyu, "Are you still in pain?"

Lin Qingyu's shifted his attention back to the book. "It's fine."

Lu Wancheng sat down on the edge of the luohan and said, "You're a patient now too. Get onto the bed and sleep."

Lin Qingyu thought that Lu Wancheng was going to exchange with him; he would get the bed and Lu Wancheng would sleep on the luohan. "No, your

illness is more serious than mine."

Lu Wancheng said as though it were natural, "So, I'll also sleep in bed."

Lin Qingyu's fingertip paused. He gave a direct refusal, "No."

"Neither of us are gay, so what are you afraid of?"

Lin Qingyu calmly turned a page, "I'm afraid you're going to trap my hair."

Lu Wancheng never expected that Lin Qingyu would use this excuse to reject him, and he couldn't help smiling as he said, "But you've never shared a bed with me, what makes you think I'll get your hair trapped?"

"Because your sleeping posture is terrible."

"Then try it with me anyway. You'll know once you give it a try."

"I won't."

"You're being too much." Lu Wancheng accused, "You shouldn't mix who I am in reality with who I am in your imagination…"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes to look at him, pretending to be cold and stern, he said, "Young Master Hou, if you spout any more nonsense, you better believe

I'm going to make you unable to spit out even a single word for the next three days."

"I believe you, I believe you. Why wouldn't I believe you?" Lu Wancheng cursed and went back to lie down in bed. "You're the vicious beauty who would dare to attack even the Crown Prince. What is there that you can't do?"

Lin Qingyu's injury reached Liang Shi's ears. Liang Shi then sent a maid to inquire about his condition. This was done simply for the sake of appearances. There was also an unfamiliar maid who came to the Blue Wind Pavilion to deliver some medical plasters to Lin Qingyu. She said that this was a secret recipe passed down within their Yiniang's family and that it had miraculous effects on sprains.

Lin Qingyu asked, "Your Yiniang?"

"That would be Sleeping Moon Zhai's Pan Yiniang," the maid said with a smile. "Shaojun probably has yet to see yet."

Among the wealthy families of the capital, Nan'an Hou's inner house was considered to be quite sparse. Aside from his wife, Nan'an Hou had only two or three concubines. Liang Shi managed them properly and the concubines knew their place. Although Lin Qingyu was the Shaojun, he was still a man, after all. Distinctions are made between the sexes and apart from when

celebrating the New Year, he generally wouldn't see these concubines face to face.

Lin Qingyu took a sniff of the ointment. It was indeed good medical plaster, but he and Pan Yiniang were complete stranger and he didn't want to owe this favor.

Lin Qingyu was about to refuse when Lu Wancheng walked out of the inner hall and spoke for him, "Leave the medicine here. Please thank Pan Yiniang for us."

Because there were others around, Lin Qingyu didn't say anything. After the maid left, without waiting for Lin Qingyu's question, Lu Wancheng said, "Pan Yiniang doesn't have any bad intentions. She's timid and honest. You can give her some face, and maybe she'll join your camp in the future."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Young Master Hou has never inquired about the matters of the inner house before. How could you tell who's good and who's bad?"

Lu Wancheng veiled his words in half-truths and half-lies, "Because I, like Dayu's National Teacher, can read the stars and predict the future."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Lin Qingyu has been married for some time already, and he knew that although Lu Wancheng looked unreliable, he has never been malicious towards him. Among the hundreds of people in the Nan'an Hou Mansion, only Lu

Wancheng was barely worthy of his trust. How could he not want to get along peacefully with Lu Wancheng? But… Lu Wancheng could only bring himself to be serious for three minutes before his inexplicable bad habit of making irresponsible remarks reared its head!

“Then go and read the stars,” Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “and stop annoying me.”

Lu Wancheng simply pretended not to hear Lin Qingyu’s dismissal, and fiddled with the plasters sent by Pan Yiniang. He said, “Do you remember the acupuncture bag that I wanted to give you but you rejected ruthlessly? It was

Pan Yiniang who had given that wedding gift. And it was one that she had sewn herself."

Lin Qingyu was a little surprised. "Is that so?"

Were Pan Shi's repeated expressions of goodwill towards him truly just an expression of her good intentions, or did she have ulterior motives?

Lin Qingyu was pondering the matter when someone suddenly held his ankle and lifted it up. He locked eyes with Lu Wancheng and said, confused, "What are you doing?"

"Helping you apply the plaster."

Lin Qingyu struggled a little, "No need, let go."

Lu Wancheng held his ankle to prevent him from moving, and said with a smile. "No need to be polite. I've got my plaster sticking skills down pat, and I guarantee that I'll stick them on beautifully."

"Get off me." Lin Qingyu used only seventy percent of his strength, and easily broke free from Lu Wancheng's grip. With Huan Tong's support, he stalked away.

Lu Wancheng looked down at his hand, grievance filling his eyes, an

expression looking as though he were about to suffocate appearing on his face.

Lin Qingyu's sprain healed after three days of recuperation. Lu Wancheng grew tired of listening to birdsong and got a myna from who knows where. The endless chatter as he undertook the meaningless task of teaching the bird to speak, was very irritating. Lin Qingyu took Huan Tong out of the Blue Wind Pavilion and taking advantage of the good spring weather, found an open space in the garden and began laying out medicinal herbs to dry.

Huan Tong spread out the medicinal herbs one by one and asked, "Young Master, the Blue Wind Pavilion's courtyard is so big and there's also enough sun, why don't we dry it there?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Too noisy, too many birds."

Huan Tong grinned, "I think it's fun. Young Master Hou has been teaching that myna bird to call out 'Doctor Lin'." Before, when the Young Master refused to let him come to the Hou Mansion, he thought life there was difficult. After coming, he found that it was quite enjoyable.

Young Master Hou had a distinguished status and has always been ill. Any good thing that comes to the Mansion are sent to their courtyard first. The courtyard's servants too get to bask in this glory. Young Master Hou himself was also crafty and interesting. Although he was not in good health, he could

always find something fun for him and he treated his family's Young Master well. This was already a blessing amidst the misfortune.

The two were drying the herbs when Huan Tong saw a girl in a pink short jacket and skirt coming towards them from a distance. He asked, "Young Master, who is that?"

Lin Qingyu looked up. Behind the girl was a momo and a maid. She must be a mistress of the household. In the Nan'an Hou Mansion, there was only one mistress at around this age — The Second Young Lady of the Hou Mansion, Lu Wancheng's half-sister, Lu Niantao.

Lu Niantao was born with bright eyes and pearly teeth. Her every move and action reflected her wealthy and noble upbringing. She slowly and unhurriedly approached Lin Qingyu. With a half-bow, she said, "Greetings, Sister-in-law."

He had no wish to bother with Liang Shi's daughter. But Lu Niantao was a girl, after all. He might as well show her a bit of face in front of the servants.

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly and said calmly, "Second Young Lady Lu."

Lu Niantao smiled and said, "Sister-in-law, you can just call me Niantao. I am embarrassed, I have been meaning to pay a visit to Eldest Brother and Sister-in-law at the Blue Wind Pavilion. It's a pity that Eldest Brother is still sick and seems unwilling to be disturbed by others. Today, we finally get the chance to

meet. As they say, Sister-in-law truly is -‘ Peerlessly magnificent, without equal in the world‘.”

“Second Young Lady Lu need not call me Sister-in-law.”

“But… you are my sister-in-law.” Lu Niantao thought for a while, “Or, should I call you ‘Lin Gege’?”

Lin Qingyu found both titles revolting. Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment, and decided to take the lesser of the two evils, “Then you should call me Sister-in-law, after all.”

Lu Niantao said softly, “Yes.” She saw the medicinal materials behind Lin Qingyu and asked, “Sister-in-law, are you drying medicine?”

“En.”

Lu Niantao’s heart moved: “Could it be for Eldest Brother?”

All these herbs were medicinal materials listed on his father’s prescription. It was extremely difficult to prepare prescriptions, and every medicinal material had its own strict requirements. It would take at least more than a month from dispensing to finish the medicine. He spent so much time and energy on preparing this medicine, but he was merely just doing it for the sake of

practice. Of course, if Lu Wancheng wanted to try the medicine for him once it was finished, it wasn't impossible.

Lin Qingyu did not respond and Lu Niantao took his silence as affirmation. "Doctor Zhang has been in charge of Eldest Brother's health since he was a child. It is Doctor Zhang who has the final say on what medicine he takes."

Lin Qingyu's patience has already been exhausted. "What do you want to say?"

"Sister-in-law, do not get me wrong!" Lu Niantao seemed a little apprehensive. "I know that Sister-in-law cares about Eldest Brother and wants him to get better soon. It's just that Eldest Brother's body is very precious, not a wisp of sloppiness must be allowed. Even if Sister-in-law was born into a renowned family of medical experts, if you wish for Eldest Brother to take this medicine, it would be best to talk to Doctor Zhang first."

Huan Tong said unhappily, "Second Young Lady, not only has my family's Young Master already obtained the Master's teachings, but he has been made

disciple by a miracle-working doctor. In terms of medical skills, that Doctor Zhang may not be as good as hun…"

Lin Qingyu faintly felt that something was wrong, and interrupted, "Huan Tong."

Huan Tong resentfully closed his mouth. Lin Qingyu said, "This medicine is not for Young Master Hou, the second lady is overly-anxious."

"Not for Eldest Brother? That's…"

"It's getting late." Lin Qingyu turned a deaf ear, "Huan Tong, pack up, we're heading back to the Blue Wind Pavilion."

When Lin Qingyu returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lu Wancheng's new favorite myna had already learned how to greet people. Lu Wancheng wound

around Lin Qingyu, carrying it in his hand. Both man and bird kept calling out, 'Doctor Lin, Doctor Lin'. Lin Qingyu wanted to poison both of them.

Lin Qingyu threatened, "If you use your bird to bother me again, I will kill it and stew it into soup."

"How fierce, Doctor Lin." Lu Wancheng handed the bird cage to Hua Lu, motioning her to carry it out. "With how fierce you are, what girl would marry you once I'm gone?"

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Young Master Hou need not worry about this. I will definitely marry a good person and during the Qingming Festival, I will bring my wife to visit Young Master Hou's grave."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Then you must remember to burn a lot of paper money. I'm afraid I won't have enough money down below."

"Of course."

After their agreement to burn paper money at his grave, Lin Qingyu moved on to discuss proper business and told Lu Wancheng about meeting Lu Niantao in

the garden. “Lu Niantao has repeatedly come to see you, but you’ve avoided her every time using various reasons. Do you know something?”

“Didn’t I tell you? I know a lot.”

On the table were Lin Qingyu’s freshly dried medicinal materials. Seeing something new, Lu Wancheng, being the type to touch things one shouldn’t, went to grab a handful. Lin Qingyu slapped his hand away, “Is this also something that ‘the stars’ told you?”

“That’s right,” Lu Wancheng blew on the back of his reddening hand, “The stars say that she’s not a good person, so just ignore her.”

Lin Qingyu said, looking pensive, “I see.”

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So one day–

Lin Qingyu looked at the soundly sleeping person sharing his bed, and sighed: As expected, my hair got trapped.

9

Chapter 9

Let alone in wealthy and influential families, even in poor humble families, paying respects to her in-laws was something that a daughter-in-law had to do. Lin Qingyu was extremely averse to doing it, but in order not to leave Liang Shi anything to hold against him, he had no choice but to appear before Liang Shi every day and go through the motions.

In the past, Liang Shi wouldn't say much to him either him. He never responded to topics between married women and Liang Shi couldn't get a firm

grasp over him. So, she would simply ask him a bit about Lu Wancheng's condition and then allow him to return to the Blue Wind Pavilion.

Early this morning, Lin Qingyu stepped into the main hall. He saw Liang Shi sitting in the main seat and knew she had something to say.

Sure enough, Liang Shi had the maid serve two cups of freshly brewed tea and then said while savoring the taste, "Qingyu, you have been married into the Hou Mansion for a while."

Lin Qingyu did not reply. Liang Shi waited for a while and then continued, "Do you know what is the most important thing about being a wife?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "I don't know."

"The top priority is, of course, to bear children children for your husband. However…" Liang Shi sighed, looking very much filled with regret.

Lin Qingyu inwardly sneered. "This I cannot do. Madam should have Young Master Hou cast me off and have him marry a good wife who can."

Liang Shi had probably grown accustomed to his sarcastic remarks and wasn't upset at being contradicted. Instead, she smiled and said, "What silly thing are

you saying? You are Wancheng's lucky star. Wancheng could never ever leave you."

When Liang Shi finished speaking, she sized up Lin Qingyu's expression. Seeing that he remained unmoved, she brought her face back to a serious expression. She said, with stern countenance, "The most important thing is what is called 'assisting one's husband and teaching one's children'. For now, the 'teaching' part, you cannot do. So you can only learn how to 'assist one's husband'. You are the Shaojun of the Hou Mansion. You too should learn how

to manage the affairs of the mansion, so that you can share Wancheng's burdens."

"Share Young Master Hou's burdens?" Lin Qingyu laughed, "Dare I ask Madam, what exactly are Young Master Hou's burdens? Is it the Hwamei being unable to sing, or the myna being unable to speak? Or… is it his illness?"

Just as Lin Qingyu guessed, upon hearing the word "illness", Liang Shi's lips pursed unnaturally. "Doctor Zhang is there to take care of Wancheng's condition."

"If I remember correctly, Master Hou once asked me to take care of Young Master Hou's body. At that time, Madam was also there."

"In-indeed, there was such a thing."

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly, "Then it shall be as Madam said."

Liang Shi's fingers curled into fists, but a smile appeared on her lips. "Long before you married, I heard the matchmaker say that the son of the Pan Yuan of the Imperial Hospital was born not only with matchless good looks, but also with outstanding talent and intelligence, with the ability to remember things with a single look. It is the most capable people who do the most work. Given

your intelligence, attending to both the matters of the mansion and to Wancheng's health should not be a difficult feat for you. —- Come."

An old woman walked in. It was Liu Momo who had been punished a month ago to do drudgery. Liu Momo presented several thick ledgers and said, "Asking Shaojun to take a look at these."

Lin Qingyu casually picked up the top one and said indifferently, "I have not seen you in a month. Liu Momo evidently appears to have aged. It seems that you have not had an easy time of doing drudgery."

Liu Momo forced a smile and said, "This servant committed a mistake. It is only right that she was punished."

"These are the ledgers for just this month. Try to organize them first. If there is anything you don't understand, you can ask Mother at any time." Liang Shi

said, “There’s quite a lot of them, but given your ability… How about three days? Within three days, tidy up the ledger and return it Mother, yes?”

Before Lin Qingyu could speak, Liu Momo rushed in to say, “Shaojun, the Madam regards you very highly.”

“Exactly,” Liang Shi said with a smile. “I am old and I wish to enjoy a life in ease and comfort. In the future, this huge Hou Mansion will depend on Qingyu’s management.”

Although the act that mistress and servant put on was clumsy, it was reasonable. The mistress has entrusted the stewardship of the household to the Shaojun. No matter how anyone looked at it, the mistress was being magnanimous and was putting her trust in the Shaojun. If the Shaojun were to shirk this responsibility, he would be branded as being unable to tell good from bad, of being an unworthy wife.

The question was, was Liang Shi sincerely letting him manage the household?

How could that possibly be? Unlike Lu Wancheng’s biological mother, Liang Shi was born ordinary. Her father was only an assistant minister below fourth-rank. She must still cower in fear in front of Nan’an Hou. There was the eldest son left by the first wife and her own biological son was trash. The only thing

Liang Shi could carry with her in the Hou Mansion was the power of stewardship.

He didn't have the least bit interest in the Hou Mansion's power of stewardship. He was, however, interested in seeing Liang Shi regret her actions, seeing her ashamed and reproaching herself.

"I will carry in my heart the Madam's kindness." Lin Qingyu threw the account book in his hand back onto the tray, "I accept these ledgers."

Liang Shi nodded, gratified, "Qingyu, don't let Mother down."

As soon as Lin Qingyu left, the gentleness left Liang Shi's face. She murmured, "He actually agreed so readily…"

Liu Momo looked askance in the direction of the door. "Don't look at how Shaojun appears like an immortal aloof from politics and material pursuits. In his heart, he still covets the wealth of the Hou Mansion."

Liang Shi shook his head. "He only has the Imperial Medical Office in his heart. Normally, he shouldn't be this kind of person."

"Why would he not be? Madam, one may know a person for a long time without understanding his true nature. You must keep your guard up. You must not let Shaojun actually seize the power of stewardship."

"About this, you can rest assured." Liang Shi said easily, "I sent someone to

inquire about it. He never asked about the account books of the Lin Residence. No matter how outstanding in ability and wisdom, it is impossible to attend to both things at once. We'll have to see which one he wants to give up. As for the stewardship…in the end, it can only be mine."

Liu Momo said solicitously, "Madam is wise."

Liang Shi slowly got up with Liu Momo's support. "Notify the servants who understand the accounts. Don't let them help people they shouldn't."

Madam Liu hurriedly said, "This servant will go at once."

In the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lu Wancheng slept until midday as usual. Seeing that his complexion didn't look so good upon waking up, Hua Lu asked him if

he was uncomfortable anywhere. Lu Wancheng rubbed his forehead and said, “I have a headache.”

Hua Lu said nervously, “You’re in perfectly good condition. How can you have a headache?”

Lu Wancheng guessed, “Probably from lack of sleep.”

Hua Lu: “…”

Although it was a common occurrence for Lu Wancheng to have headaches and slight fevers, Hua Lu didn’t dare be the slightest bit neglectful. And so, she went to the study and invited Lin Qingyu over.

Lin Qingyu checked his pulse, felt his forehead, and said, “You’re sleeping too much.”

Lu Wancheng was shocked. “Impossible.”

“Why would it be impossible?” Lin Qingyu said, “Do you think you’re a baby? You sleep for sixteen hours a day. If anyone’s going to get a headache, it’s you.”

Lu Wancheng sighed, “What should I do then?”

Lin Qingyu sat on the side of the bed, massaging Lu Wancheng’s temples for him, the force of his hands neither light nor heavy. “Sleep less. In the future,

even if you want to wake up, you might not…”

His voice stopped abruptly.

Lu Wancheng was resting on Lin Qingyu’s lap, smelling the faint scent of books on him. Suddenly there was a hint of uneasiness. He stiffened for a

moment. Telling himself that Lin Qingyu was also a man, he then relaxed, closing his eyes to enjoy this moment of peace.

He hadn't enjoyed for long before Lin Qingyu ruthlessly stopped and got up, letting Hua Lu take his place.

Lu Wancheng said quietly, "It's over?"

"I'm very busy."

"Huh? What are you doing?"

Light as a feather, Lin Qingyu let out this sentence, "You have a good stepmother."

After Lu Wancheng inquired a little bit, he found out what had happened that morning. He couldn't help chuckling and he said, "She's in a bit of a hurry, isn't she? Can't even wait for a few months…Not bad."

Hua Lu couldn't understand. She said, "If Shaojun becomes the one managing the household in the future, wouldn't our life be better?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "What are you thinking?"

In the afternoon, Lin Qingyu ran out of the study, taking the medicine roller with him. The Blue Wind Pavilion had an elegant gazebo most suitable for

enjoying the spring scenery. It was a pity that Lin Qingyu came a step late and the pavilion had already been occupied.

Lu Wancheng was half-lying on a rocking chair. Rocking slowly, he basked in the sun. Dressed as he was in red, with a languid look on his face, and his long hair carelessly tied together, it added to his romantic and unrestrained air.

Hearing Lin Qingyu's footsteps, Lu Wancheng opened his eyes and looked. "Why is Doctor Lin here? And I thought you'd be staying in your study the whole day."

Lin Qingyu said, "I'm here to pound medicine."

Lu Wancheng asked, "Eh? Aren't you looking at the accounts?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I'll deal with it later."

"Then, not only do you want to read medical books and dispense medicine, but

you also want look at the accounts? You want everything?"

Lin Qingyu asked in reply, " Otherwise?"

"Can you even finish it?"

"I'll try."

"Oh… Doctor Lin, what kind of medicine are you pounding now?"

"A good medicine for causing kidney weakness in men."

Lu Wancheng:?

In a gazebo by the water, with luxuriant flowers and trees all around, the two of them, ones basking in the sun, the other pounding medicine, shared this boundless spring scenery.

It was already getting late by the time Lin Qingyu finished today's matter of dispensing medicine. He lit the lamp in the study and began to look through the ledgers. Though it was true that he has never come into contact with the household's general affairs, he was constantly by his mother's side when he was young. His mother often managed the accounts, and imperceptibly

influenced by what he has seen and heard, he too managed to get the general idea.

Bookkeeping is done in a streamlined way, so it's not difficult to understand. But the writing in the account books Liang Shi gave him were small and blurred. After only half an hour of looking at it, and his eyes were already sore. In addition, the transaction dates were confusing, details were missing, and the contents missing from one book appeared in another… No wonder Liang Shi wanted him to finish it in three days.

But even so, it might not be impossible for him to do it.

In the dead of night, the candlelight flickered. Hearing the soft sounds behind the door, Huan Tong, who'd been waiting upon Lin Qingyu by the desk, ran to open the door, "Young Master Hou? Why aren't you asleep yet?"

Lu Wancheng stepped into the study with Hua Lu's help. "The night is long and I'm not in any mood to sleep. Besides, your Young Master won't let me sleep more."

With his head down, looking at the ledger, Lin Qingyu said, "I told you to sleep less during the day. I didn't tell you to stay up late."

From morning to night, Lin Qingyu didn't stop for even a moment. By this time, he could no longer hide his exhaustion. Seeing Lin Qingyu's tired face, Lu Wancheng's chest tightened. He said, "It's zishi already. How about you

don't look at those for now? Leave today's matters to tomorrow's you, how about it?"

Lin Qingyu didn't look up. "Tomorrow's me would rather give it to today's Young Master Hou."

"……Eh?"

"Since Young Master Hou has a long night ahead of him and doesn't wish to sleep, why not come and help me…?"

Lu Wancheng choked. He put his hands to his temples and starting walking backwards. "My head's starting to hurt again. Let me lie down. I should lie down…"

Lu Wancheng slipped away so fast that it made Huan Tong wonder if his illness had already healed. Huan Tong served Lin Qingyu a fresh cup of tea,

and whispered, “That Young Master Hou! Really! He’s so averse to even the littlest bit of work.”

Lin Qingyu was used to it. “He’s just a bag of lazy bones. You’d be better off burning incense and praying to Buddha than to count on him.”

When he said these words, he found that Lu Wancheng had unexpectedly turned back and returned. Allowing no explanation, he walked in front of Lin Qingyu. Expression imposing, he looked at the books spread out on the table.

Lin Qingyu was baffled. “What?”

Lu Wancheng leaned forward and blew out the table lamp.

Lin Qingyu: “…”

In the darkness, he felt a cool touch around his wrist. Lu Wancheng had unexpectedly gotten hold on his wrist. “Go to sleep, the account books… leave them to me.”

Lin Qingyu broke free of his grip. “Leave them to you? You’re not just going to leave them undone, are you?”

Lu Wancheng was momentarily at a loss for words. He was unable to refute.

“Besides, if Liang Shi finds out that you’d done it, wouldn’t she accuse me of

being disrespectful to my husband? I want to do this well because…"

"I know, you want to take this opportunity to slap her in the face. But there's no need to make life difficult for yourself. You don't like managing the affairs of the household so why force yourself?" Lu Wancheng said, "Huan Tong, hide the lamp. Don't let your Young Master light it."

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Young Master Hou, mind your own business. Don't involve yourself in mine. Huan Tong, turn on the lamp."

Huan Tong didn't dare disobey the Young Master's words and he turned on the lamp again. Lin Qingyu then saw that Lu Wancheng's expression was no

longer his usual lazy and casual one. Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows and said, “Your business?”

Lu Wancheng like this felt a little unfamiliar to Lin Qingyu.

Lu Wancheng said again, “Since when were the troubles created by my stepmother, your business? Shouldn’t it be mine?”

“There’s no need to trouble yourself.” Lin Qingyu’s voice was a bit cold, “Young Master Hou should just rest and recuperate.”

Lu Wancheng was silent for a moment. He then suddenly smiled, returning to normal again. “But without Doctor Lin in the room, I can’t sleep at night.”

“Then you might as well stay up.” Lin Qingyu didn’t feel sorry for him at all. “The occasional burning of the midnight oil never killed anyone.”

Lu Wancheng: “…”

Neither of them slept well that night. Lin Qingyu went to bed in the wee hours of the morning and still got up early to continue burying himself in the books.

“Young Master,” Huan Tong’s voice came from outside, “There’s an uncle who

wants to see you. He said he was summoned here by Young Master Hou."

What was Lu Wancheng up to?

Lin Qingyu frowned. "Let him in."

Not long after, a regular-looking middle-aged man walked in and said, "Paying my respects to Shaojun. I am an accountant from Wen Guo Gong's Mansion. My surname is Zhang, and my name is Zhang Shiquan."

Lin Qingyu was a bit surprised but he more or less understood what was going on. "Young Master Hou asked you to come to…?"

"Last night, Young Master Hou wrote to Master Guo Gong. The letter said that Shaojun had some messy accounts he needs to take care of and that he was unable to do as much as he would like to. After choosing carefully, Master Guo Gong sent me to come help." Zhang Shiquan respectfully said, "Do not worry, Shaojun. I have been doing work in accounting since I was a child. No matter how bad the accounts are, I can settle them in one go."

Lin Qingyu came back to his senses and handed a ledger to Zhang Shiquan. "Manager Zhang, please take a look."

Zhang Shiquan turned a few pages and then said, "This ledger was obviously deliberately made confusing. If Shaojun would entrust this matter to me,

please allow me to take a day to fix this. Your complexion does not look too good. You should go back and rest. ”

There is specialization in every industry. If he could achieve the goal, Lu Qingyu didn’t want to waste time on it.

Lin Qingyu walked out of the study. He stopped a maidservant, and asked, “Where is Young Master Hou?”

The maid said, “Young Master Hou has finished his meal. He’s already gone to the garden.”

Lin Qingyu arrived at the garden. Lu Wancheng was playing the pitch-pot game with a few of the maids and pages. Huan Tong lost half of his monthly allowance and was wailing in distress. Lu Wancheng was sitting to the side, the corners of his lips flying up into a smile. He bore a remarkable resemblance to an ignorant and incompetent silk-clothes disciple.

Lin Qingyu looked at him for a long time, and suddenly felt… as if he could understand Lu Wancheng.

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Young Master Hou: Gradually rising up for the sake of his wife

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10

Chapter 10

Naturally, the person personally selected by Wen Guo Gong for his grandson would be very capable. Zhang Shiquan was so experienced and so careful that it really took him only a day to sort out all the books.

“I have already sorted out all these ledgers.” Zhang Shiquan had a well-thought out plan, “If Young Master Hou and Shaojun feel uneasy, you may look through it again. However, not to boast but I have been balancing books for more than 30 years and I have not made even half an error.”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “You have worked hard.”

“Manager Zhang is amazing.” Lu Wancheng raised his eyes and motioned to Hua Lu, who immediately stepped forward to give Zhang Shiquan the reward he had prepared in advance — a heavy bag of silver. “I expect there to be a

follow-up to this matter. Please stay in Nan'an Hou Mansion for the time being."

Zhang Shiquan bowed and said, "By Young Master Hou's orders."

As soon as Zhang Shiquan left, Lu Wancheng's straight back immediately drooped. He lay on the table, looking at Lin Qingyu. He made as if to speak but stopped.

Lin Qingyu flipped through the finished ledger and said lightly, "If you have something to say, just say it."

"I said to leave it to me but you still didn't believe me."

His tone sounded a bit accusatory.

It was a pity that this sort of move was useless on Lin Qingyu. "And indeed, it wasn't you who dealt with it. You asked someone else to deal with it."

"What's the difference?"

"You can't always rely on others for everything."

"Why not? I gave him money. It's a win-win situation."

"Then, when you're too lazy to eat, to sleep, or to marry a wife and make

children, will you also have someone deal with it for you?"

"Make children, you say?" Lu Wancheng pretended to fall deep in thought, "En… it'd be great if I didn't have to move myself."

Lin Qingyu didn't understand what Lu Wancheng was talking about. When he understood, he got up suddenly, his face burning. "I didn't mean that!"

Lu Wancheng smiled and raised his eyes. "Then what did you mean?"

He merely wanted to say that there were things that one needed to do by oneself. Only a lecher would associate that with some other thing.

Lin Qingyu looked down with drooping lids at the lecher leaning against the table, and said, "You're hopeless."

In the blink of an eye, it was the day when Liang Shi was to check the ledgers.

Liang Shi got up early. As before, she sat in front of the mirror to dress and make up. Behind her, Liu Momo was putting her hair in a bun.

Liang Shi suddenly felt the pain of hair being pulled from her scalp and she cried out in surprise. "What's the matter with you? After a month of hard work in the garden and you can't comb hair anymore?"

"Madam, forgive me. Forgive me, Madam." Liu Momo bowed and scraped. She lowered her head and wiped her tears. From out the corner of her eye, she

looked at Liang Shi, trying to gauge her expression. “To tell Madam the truth, this servants is nearing sixty and was made to endure such hardship. These hands have held a broom for an entire month and is now tasked with holding Madam’s jade comb. This servant is afraid of dirtying the Madam’s things.”

Liang Shi smoothened out the hair near her temples and said, voice deep, “You are my trusted aide. Punishing you was depriving me of face. You have been wronged. Today…” The corners of Liang Shi’s lips ticked up, “Let’s see.”

Lu Niantao came early to pay her respects to Liang Shi. Even after doing so, she didn’t leave, staying to accompany Liang Shi. However, they waited until the tea had gone cold but they saw neither hide nor hair of Lin Qingyu.

Liu Momo craned her neck and looked out. “Could it be that Shaojun is lacking in self-confidence and so, didn’t even come to pay his respects? This is

too unsightly. A male wife from a humble family simply doesn't understand the rules."

"Liu Momo, watch your words." Lu Niantao said without urgency. "We shall wait. If we can no longer wait then we shall simply sent someone to inquire."

Before she could even finish her words, from outside, came the announcement of his arrival. "Young Master and Shaojun are here."

Lu Niantao was surprised. "Eldest brother is also here?"

Liu Momo curled her lips in contempt. "He must have come to make a request on Shaojun's behalf."

For some reason, Liang Shi felt somewhat apprehensive. If this was before, Lu Wancheng was nothing but a sick seedling. She coaxed him, flattered him and then used the Chong Xi to find him a male wife. Once he could no longer hold on, she would finally wait patiently for him to die. But since Lin Qingyu married into the family, this sick seedling's body grew better day after day. He could even get out of bed now and his temperament also changed a lot. The medicine Lin Qingyu was formulating must have something to do with it.

Thinking of how Lu Wancheng had, going round the curves and skirting the corners, 'given her a warning' last time, even bringing up his birth mother, Liang Shi felt so dejected that she hadn't slept well for several days. In the past, whatever she said, Lu Wancheng would simply heed. Who would have

expected that Lu Wancheng would protect this male wife who couldn't even come up with anything in his belly.

She has lived the greater half of her life and she has never seen any Chong Xi that actually chased away the sickness to bring the husband to health. She didn't believe in this kind of thing which was why she could go around begging for a marriage from the Lin Family, putting on an act displaying her motherly love in front of Master Hou. Had she known earlier, she would have hardened her heart and sent Lu Wancheng away early.

Seeing Liang Shi's ugly expression, Lu Niantao called out, "Mother?"

Liang Shi's brows furrowed, "I might not be able to hold down the present Lu Wancheng."

Lu Niantao smiled and said, "Don't worry, Mother. Father is a reasonable person. So long as 'reason' is on your side, you have nothing to fear."

Liu Momo clapped her hands, "The Second Young Lady's words have reached the heart of this slave. It is with good intentions that you are cultivating

Shaojun. It is Shaojun himself who proved to be incapable and unable to figure out the ledgers. Could this possibly still be reasonable?!"

Liang Shi pulled herself together. "What you say is but sensible. I have nothing to fear."

While they were talking, Lin Qingyu, pushing along Lu Wancheng, walked in. Liang Shi smiled, "You're here."

Lu Niantao got up and saluted, "Eldest Brother, Sister-in-law."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said nothing, while Lu Wancheng followed with a very low pressure "En."

Liang Shi and Lu Niantao exchanged looks, not knowing where Lu Wancheng's anger came from. Only Lin Qingyu knew that Lu Wancheng's anger came from his irritability in the mornings. Liu Momo didn't look too

carefully and said, deliberately ambiguous, “Young Master is finally here after having kept the Madam waiting.”

“It was I who lazed about in bed and he then got up late.” Lu Wancheng raised his eyes and asked nonchalantly, “Are you saying that there’s something the matter?”

Meeting Lu Wancheng’s gaze, Liu Momo flinched. Assuming a well-behaved manner, as though she’d been bullied, she said, “This servant dares not.”

Lu Niantao asked, deeply concerned “Isn’t Eldest Brother already able to walk about? Why is he in a wheelchair again?”

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “He’s too sleepy and too lazy to walk.”

Lu Wancheng retorted, “It’s the Blue Wind Pavilion that’s too far from here.”

In the final analysis, it could be summed up with the word ‘lazy’.

Lin Qingyu didn’t want to waste time with Liang Shi and the others. Without waiting for Liang Shi to speak, he went straight to the matter at hand. “Huan Tong.”

Huan Tong presented the ledgers to Liang Shi. “Our family’s Young Master has already sorted out all the ledgers. Asking Madam to please look through it.”

Though it was not apparent from Liang Shi’s face but inwardly, she was filled

with misgivings. This young man was acting so bold and assured; could it be that Lin Qingyu really finished sorting out a month's account in three days? The servants of the Blue Wind Pavilion clearly said that Lin Qingyu had been reading books and dispensing medicines as usual for the past three days. Where did he find the time to sort out these ledgers?

Liu Momo had the same idea as her. She whispered, "Madam, why don't you take a look? You'll know once you do."

Liang Shi leafed through the account book, and with every page she turned, her sense of oppression grew. After looking at only half the book, a chill had already gone through her heart. Though, she still forced a smile on her face. "These accounts are sorted out in proper order. You've handled everything thoroughly. As expected of Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu said, "Madam flatters me."

Liu Momo's face changed. She almost blurted out the words "how is it possible?"; fortunately, she was stopped by the look in Liang Shi's eyes and she changed her words, "Madam, how about you take a closer look?"

Liang Shi was someone who knew the accounts. She's been managing the household for almost 20 years. At a glance, she knew that this husband and

wife came prepared. Even just doing it in such neat order, even the Hou Mansion's bookkeeper might not be able to do it.

How was this possible…? No one in Blue Wind Pavilion understood the accounts. How were they actually able to accomplish this?

Liang Shi was feeling agitated and she no longer had a good expression when facing Liu Momo. "I didn't look at it closely enough. Why don't you come and see?"

Lu Niantao pondered for a long time, and said with a smile, "I heard that it is the first time Sister-in-law has come in contact with household matters and he

was unexpectedly able to do it so perfectly. Mother, you can rest assured that you can hand over the duties of the household to Sister-in-law in the future."

"That sounds reasonable." Lu Wancheng smiled subtly, "After Mother has handed over everything, she can start living her life in ease and comfort."

Lu Niantao said, "Elder brother and Sister-in-law are really filial. Speaking of which, Sister-in-law also has a highly retentive memory. He must have remembered all the things on these ledgers?"

Liang Shi's eyes lit up. She glanced at her daughter with admiration, and then said, "In this case, allow me to give a test to Qingyu."

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows. He was about to get up, but Lin Qingyu held him down by his shoulders. "Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Let her give the test."

Liang Shi opened the account book and asked, "How many stores does our Nan'an Hou Mansion have in the capital?"

"Twenty-six stores. Among them, there are three banks, three restaurants, two

tea shops, two silk cloth shops, two porcelain shops…"

"Which village had the best harvest last month?"

"Shuyang Village, twenty miles out in the suburbs of the capital."

Liang Shi's tone became impatient, "The Hou Mansion in Xuzhou has…"

"In total, there are five silk cloth shops, with a total loss of 1,300 taels last month." Lin Qingyu said carelessly, "If I remember correctly, Liang Shi's ancestral home is in Xuzhou."

Liang Shi slowly put down the ledger. With extreme difficulty she managed to squeeze out a smile. "You have indeed remembered everything perfectly."

Seeing Liu Momo unable to utter even a single fart, Huan Tong wanted to exchange a cheerful look with Young Master Hou. Their Young Master could

read obscure medical books and memorize them forwards and backwards. What was an insignificant little ledger? Liang Shi was really thick-skinned!

But Young Master Hou wasn't looking anywhere in his direction. He had his eyes quietly trained on their family's Young Master. There was a smile in his eyes and it overflowed with light, as though he were somewhat proud.

Lin Qingyu said, "Does Madam have anything else to ask?"

Liang Shi forcibly raised her spirits. "No-no more."

Lu Wancheng said to Lin Qingyu, "You go back first. I still have something to say to Mother."

Lin Qingyu glanced at Liang Shi. He then looked away and left with Huan Tong.

Lu Niantao got up as well and said with a smile, "I'll go see Sister-in-law out."

Apart from the servants who were serving in the hall, only Lu Wancheng and Liang Shi were left. Liang Shi held up the tea cup to conceal her anxiety, "What else does Wancheng have to say?"

Lu Wancheng raised his hand. "I'd like to stand when talking to Mother. Can Mother help me?"

Liang Shi froze, then said, "How can I not? Ever since you were a child, it was

already I who carried you to grow up." She stepped forward and helped Lu Wancheng up. The two stood face to face and she only reached up to Lu Wancheng's shoulders. It created the illusion of being suppressed.

"Mother actually needn't worry." Lu Wancheng said slowly, "I am terminally ill. Even if Hua Tuo were to spring back to life, his medicines would have no effect. And Qingyu isn't looking through his books for me; the medicine he makes is also not for me— Even if it were, he wouldn't be able to save me."

Liang Shi's eyes kept dodging all around. "This child, what are you talking about?"

There was a smile at the corners of Lu Wancheng's lips. "I don't have much time. I have less than half a year left. I just want to eat, drink and look at beautiful women." He slowly approached Liang Shi, "Can I, Mother?"

Liang was forced to retreat again and again until she had no where to go. Dejected, she slumped to a sit. She held tightly to the corner of the table. Her

lips covered behind her fingers were pale. With a trembling voice, she said, “I…”

“Young Master Hou, what are you doing!” Liu Momo wanted to step forward to stop him, “Madam is the head mistress of the family. How can Young Master Hou be so impolite!”

Lu Wancheng shot her a glance, rays of hostility condensed between his eyebrows. “Did I allow you to speak?”

The leg Liu Momo had out to take the first step, suddenly went weak. It also felt like it was nailed in place. It was as though something was clutching her throat and she didn’t even dare to pant. Except for her, all the other servants

stood quietly aside. No one dared to step forward to help the mistress of the house.

The hall was deathly silent.

After a long time, Lu Wancheng turned back to Liang Shi and said with a smile, “Mother, you haven’t answered me yet.”

Liang Shi’s expression twisted in panic, and an indistinct voice issued form her throat, “You ca-…can.”

Lu Wancheng curled his lips and smiled, “Thank you, Mother.”

Not long after Lin Qingyu returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lu Wancheng also returned. Looking exhausted, he coughed several times.

Since the weather got warmer, Lu Wancheng’s cough has obviously improved a lot. Why was he coughing again? Lu Wancheng himself paid it no mind. “Maybe it’s because I was talking a bit too pretentiously just now.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “What did you say to Liang Shi?”

“Nothing, I just told her to behave a bit, that’s all.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t ask much. “Give me your hand, and let me examine your

pulse."

Lu Wan stretched out his hand and yawned, "Doctor Lin…"

"What?"

Lu Wancheng rubbed his eyes with the back of his other hand. "Time for beddy-bye."

Lin Qingyu was momentarily speechless. "How old are you to still use baby talk!"

"Fine." Lu Wancheng changed his tune and said leisurely, " With the warm spring breeze, drowsiness, an unexpected attack. Your husband, in his bed, he would like to get back ."

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The Great Beauty was indifferent: If you're too lazy to walk, then roll.

Young Master Hou, vomiting blood: I'm moving! I'm moving! Are you still not satisfied!?

11

Chapter 11

Lin Qingyu heard Lu Wancheng's low cough and knew that the situation wasn't good. Sure enough, after a night, Lu Wancheng developed a fever.

The servants of the Blue Wind Pavilion have become accustomed to this. Lu Wancheng's illness has always been sometimes good and sometimes bad. When it was good, he could just barely get out of bed and walk about; when it was bad, he could stay asleep for more than half a month; only waking up once in a while — like the month before the Chong Xi.

After the Chong Xi, Lu Wancheng's body improved. But then, what was his foundation? His illness came like a collapsing mountain. Early the next day, he

wouldn't wake up, and an abnormal redness appeared on his pale handsome face.

Hua Lu placed the towel soaked in cold water on Lu Wancheng's forehead, and said anxiously, "Shaojun, there should be nothing wrong with the Young Master, right?"

After Lin Qingyu felt his pulse, he put Lu Wancheng's hand under the quilt. "It's just a common cold."

Hua Lu breathed a sigh of relief. "Then he should be fine after the fever passes?"

Lin Qingyu was unwilling to comment. For normal healthy people, they won't even need to take medicine for a cold. They will be better after a couple of days. But Lu Wancheng's body had been hollowed out by years of illness. The slightest carelessness and a simple cold could turn deadly.

Not long after, Feng Qin took Doctor Zhang to the Blue Wind Pavilion. On this trip, Doctor Zhang brought a disciple with him. This disciple was none other than Tan Qizhi, whom he'd last seen at the Lin Residence.

Tan Qizhi smiled at Lin Qingyu and said, "It's been a long time since I've seen you, Brother Qingyu. I trust you've been well since we last met."

Lin Qingyu looked towards Doctor Zhang. Doctor Zhang explained, "Qizhi has just recently entered my apprenticeship. Hearing that Young Master Hou

was ill, he could not rest assured and insisted on visiting the Hou Mansion."

"He could not rest assured." Lin Qingyu smiled, "I didn't know that Tan Xiong and Young Master Hou were familiar with each other."

Tan Qizhi said, casting aside shame, "That day at the Lin Residence, Young Master Hou and I hit it off from the start…"

Lin Qingyu interrupted aloud, "Young Master Hou is sick and feeling weak. It would be best for fast friends who've no business being here to not add any

more trouble. Hua Lu, take Dr. Zhang in. As for Tan Xiong, he may as well stand here and wait."

Feng Qin hesitated and said, "Shaojun, you mean to let the guest…stand?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "What guest?"

It was noon. Standing at the doorway, with the sun beating down at him, being watched by the people coming and going; it was not an exaggeration to say that it made for a humiliating scene.

Doctor Zhang looked helplessly at Tan Qizhi and followed Hua Lu into the room. Tan Qizhi gritted his teeth with hatred. Forcibly keeping his voice down, he said, "Lin Qingyu, you're taken it too far with your bullying!"

Lin Qingyu thought it was funny. "How could I bully you if you hadn't delivered yourself to my doorstep?"

Tan Qizhi glared at Lin Qingyu, his eyes seemed to fill with poison.

Lin Qingyu couldn't remember having ever taken the initiative to provoke Tan Qizhi, nor did he know where Tan Qizhi's hatred for him came from. Perhaps this was how the world was. There are unprovoked joys so, naturally there are

unprovoked evils. As Lu Wancheng has said, taking this kind of person seriously would only demean himself.

Tan Qizhi took a step closer and said, “There are only a hundred days left for the examination of the Imperial Medical Office. While Lu Wancheng remains

alive, you can only stay in the Hou Mansion to take care of him, serve him tea and water, give him medicine, and be a good wife. ”

Catching the slight stiffness in Lin Qingyu’s expression, Tan Qizhi revealed a happy smile. “Heh, so what if you’re a genius? So what if you hold me down in everything? In the end, isn’t it…”

Lin Qingyu suddenly said, “So, that’s how it is.”

The light in Tan Qizhi’s eyes sank. “What are you laughing at!”

The corner of Lin Qingyu’s lips ticked up slightly. Almost pityingly, he said, “You’re so pathetic.” After that, he no longer looked at Tan Qizhi.

Lu Wancheng has been under Doctor Zhang’s care for many years, and was very knowledgeable about Lu Wancheng’s condition. Lin Qingyu watched as he checked his pulse and came to the same conclusion that it was a cold.

Doctor Zhang wrote out a prescription and after a few words of urging, hurriedly left.

Doctor Zhang’s medicine was nothing more than commonly used cold medicine. But Lu Wancheng’s body was different from that of others. If this prescription used by ordinary people could be formulated specifically to

improve his illness, it could perhaps achieve twice the results with half the effort.

Hua Lu was still waiting for the prescription in Lin Qingyu's hand to have it filled. She asked, "Shaojun, is there anything wrong with this prescription?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment, and handed the prescription to Hua Lu. "No, get going."

When Lu Wancheng became ill, the entire Blue Wind Pavilion became busy. Lin Qingyu didn't need to worry about decocting and feeding him medicine or taking care of him by his sickbed. There were servants to do those things. As usual, he read and dispensed medicine in the study. However, he was a bit unused to it because the courtyard was too quiet. Both the Hwamei and Myna had their beaks closed. Could it be that they were also worried about their owner?

But what's the use of worrying? Even if Lu Wancheng survives this time, there's always going to be that one that he doesn't. If he doesn't prepare himself for the fate of a person who was bound to die, when the time comes, only he would be caught off guard.

He has almost finished formulating his prescription. The next step was to boil the medicine and make it into pills that were easy to carry and store. Being

that it was his first time making a pill of this difficulty, he wanted to do every step himself.

Lin Qingyu arrived at the dispensary specially used to make medicine for Lu Wancheng. Inside were several little maids decocting medicinal herbs. Though bustling about, they didn't forget to chat about the behind-the-scenes stories of the mansion.

"In the past, whenever the Young Master feel ill, the Madam would definitely be the first to come running. There were even times when she would personally take care of the young master's medicinal broth. What's going on? Why hasn't she come yet?"

"I heard from the Sister Shou in the madam's courtyard that the Eldest Young Master and the madam had a big quarrel. The madam was scolded by the Eldest Young Master so badly that she couldn't even stand steady."

"Are you sure you didn't hear wrong? Shouldn't it be the Eldest Young Master who's unsteady on his feet? Besides, Madam and the Eldest Young Master has always had a caring and filial relationship. Why would they even quarrel?"

"Of course, it is for the Shaojun. The relationship between mother-in-law and daughter-in-law has always been a problem for the ages. My sister-in-law and

my mother have small quarrels every three days and big ones every five. They quarrel so much, my brother feels like his head is about to explode…"

Lin Qingyu pushed open the door of the dispensary and the voices inside stopped abruptly, leaving only the bubbling sounds of the boiling decoction.

Lin Qingyu ignored the little maids with fear and trepidation on their faces. He walked straight to the stove, as though he hadn't heard anything at all.

After returning, Lin Qingyu called Huan Tong and instructed, "Go to Liang Shi's courtyard and get the ledger for this month."

Huan Tong couldn't understand. "Young Master, what do you want the ledger for?"

"To share her worries for her."

Once news of Lu Wancheng's illness spread to Liang Shi's ears, the pressure that had persisted for several days on Liang Shi's chest finally eased. Liu Momo, gloating over other's misfortune, said, "This is retribution, Madam. It

is the Heavens unable to stand by and watch how the Young Master treated you that day. They are punishing this unfilial child!"

Liang Shi recalled the things that had happened that day and a lingering fear remained in her heart. "No matter, since Lin Shi can't save him, then just let him be."

At this moment, a maid came in and said that the Huan Tong of the Blue Wind Pavilion had arrived.

"Lin Shi's dowry page?" Liang Shi's brows furrowed tightly, "What is he here for?"

"He came to get this month's account book. He says that Shaojun wishes to share the Madam's worries."

Liang Shi's chest rose and fell upon hearing these words. "He really said that?"

"Madam, did you hear that?" Liu Momo's teeth itched with hatred. "Now, you can no longer just let matters be. Shaojun is clearly out to seize power from you. You can't just sit back and wait for death!"

Liang Shi said irritably, "But what can I do! In the beginning, it is true that I said I wanted Lin Shi to take charge of the household. Who would have thought that the Lin Shi would be so capable?"

Liu Momo cast her eyes around and waved away the servants. She leaned in to

Liang Shi's ear and said, "Why not do this…"

"No." Liang Shi said, voice deep. "Lu Wancheng already warned me, I'm worried that he'll find out…"

"Isn't Young Master Hou sick right now? It's hard to say whether you can survive this. Besides, have you forgotten what the Second Young Lady has said? So long as reason is on your side, Master Hou will side with you. You have nothing to be afraid of."

Seeing that the Liang Shi was still undecided, Liu Momo added, "Even if you don't consider this for yourself, you have to think about the Second Young Lady and the Third Young Master. Is it possible that you really want a widow to take charge of the Hou Mansion?"

"Niantao, Qiao Song…" Liang Shi silently recited the names of her two children, and composed herself, "Liu Momo, please send the account book to the Blue Wind Pavilion."

Liu Momo grinned from ear to ear. "This servant will go now."

After Lin Qingyu got the ledger, he called Zhang Shiquan and asked him to check carefully for anything wrong. After looking through it, Zhang Shiquan

said, “With only two months of accounts, I dare not jump to conclusions. With three or four months of accounts, I should be able to see some clues.”

Lin Qingyu asked Huan Tong to send back the account book for this month. He then ask for the ledgers of the previous few months.

On the third day of Lu Wancheng’s lethargy, there were finally signs of the fever receding; though the person himself had yet to wake up. The blood and energy he managed to raise during this period was also all used up. He lay quietly on the bed, his eyes closed tightly. He had wasted away and his bones were sticking out. He was like a candle struggling in the wind. It really made people… people who care about him, endlessly anxious.

Hua Lu fed Lu Wancheng the medicinal decoction. Lu Wancheng’s brows tightened, as if even in his dream he couldn’t forget the bitterness of the medicine. He even spit out a little. Hua Lu hurriedly tried to grab a kerchief to wipe it. Lin Qingyu took the medicine bowl from her hand. “I’ll do it.”

Lin Qingyu took a spoonful, drew it close to his lips and blew on it gently. Before he could get it to Lu Wancheng’s mouth, he heard Feng Qin’s voice calling from outside. “Shaojun, the Madam requests that you go to her.”

Lin Qingyu paused and returned the medicine bowl to Hua Lu. “Continue feeding him.”

Lin Qingyu arrived at the front hall. Liang Shi was still sitting in her seat as mistress. Liu Momo stayed to one side. There was also an unfamiliar middle-

aged man standing in the hall, a worried expression on his face.

Liang Shi asked, insincerely courteous, “Has Wancheng gotten better?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Madam, just tell me if you have something to say.”

Liang Shi lost a little control over her feelings. “This is the accountant of the Hou Mansion, Manager Wang.”

Manager Wang bowed and saluted, “Greetings, Shaojun.”

“The situation is like this. Manager Wang found that the ledger sent back from the Blue Wind Pavilion has one page missing.” Liang Shi paused, “And it’s also

the most important page recording the revenue and expenditure of the restaurants in the capital."

Manager Wang said, choked with emotions, "Such an careless omission has befallen such an important account book. I can only wish I could apologize for it with my death!"

……So noisy.

These people really won't stop. Instead of circling around them, it would better to just use poison to get them to behave. Lin Qingyu said, "I advise you to think twice."

Manager Wang said blankly, "Think twice?"

"Apologizing with death." Lin Qingyu said, "Of course, if you insist on dying, I won't stop you."

Manager Wang was stunned. He was just paying lip service just now. How could he really be willing to die for a missing page in a book? Manager Wang looked at Liang Shi and Liu Momo for help. Liu Momo generously comforted, "Manager Wang, please don't say that. It has nothing to do with you. When you

sent the ledger, the ledger was clearly intact. Madam can testify for you. It was when Huan Tong sent back the ledger that there was a single page missing."

Lin Qingyu quietly watched their act.

Liang Shi felt apprehensive with the way he was looking at her. She smiled and said, "Qingyu, you are the manager of the household. Careless slips are inevitable. Pay attention next time. It's just that that missing page has to be

retrieved, otherwise the accounts are going to be messy. Why don't you go back to the Blue Wind Pavilion to look for it?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Fine."

Lin Qingyu returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Hearing a burst of laughter outside the house, he couldn't help but sneer while feeling relieved at the same time.

Joking and laughing with the maids as soon as he wakes up; someone's life is pretty hard.

As soon as he entered the room, he met Lu Wancheng's gaze, as if Lu Wancheng had been looking at the door all this time.

Lu Wancheng let out a couple of coughs. Voice hoarse, he said, "You're back?"

"En. How do you feel?"

"It feels like… I'm sick, then I'm alive again. I'm sick again and I'm alive again…"

Lin Qingyu lost his expression. "You have so much energy. Drink your medicine yourself. Stop having others always feed you."

Lu Wancheng laughed and said, "I didn't have you feed me. Why so fierce

again?"

"I…" Lin Qingyu closed his eyes slightly and calmed down. There have been too many idiots these past few days. He must have been affected and he found his temper hard to restrain. "I didn't want to be angry with you. It's just a habit, sorry."

Lu Wancheng grew quiet. He said jokingly, "Is Doctor Lin disappointed because I didn't die?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "A little bit."

Lu Wancheng laughed, only a pair of eyes brightened on his wan face. "I'm sorry. It wasn't my idea either."

12

Chapter 12

Lin Qingyu didn't know what Lu Wancheng was apologizing to him for.

——Because he didn't die? Because he didn't try to die before the Imperial Medical Office's examination?

There was still more than three months before the exam. If Lu Wancheng passed away during that period, he would have the opportunity to take the exam. He should be hoping that Lu Wancheng dies soon, just as he had when he first married him. Lu Wancheng hadn't known about the Chong Xi and he wasn't going to attack innocent people. He just needed to be patient and wait for his lamp to run out of oil.

But what has he been doing these days? He got the prescription from his father, and worked hard to improve, dispense, and make the medicine. Though it was true that this was his hobby, could it be that he really had no intention of saving the other?

Ha, this can't even be called 'saving'. At best, it would enable Lu Wancheng to struggle at death's door for another six months. Since Lu Wancheng didn't care

whether he lived or died, what difference was there whether he had these six months or not?

"If you really want to die so much, then just…" Lin Qingyu's throat moved slightly and did not finish what he was going to say.

Lu Wancheng seemed to have guessed what he was thinking, and said, half-lie and half-truth, "No way, Doctor Lin. Those who commit suicide will go to hell. Not only can you never reincarnate, but you'll also be enslaved by ghosts to do hard labor every day. You won't get even a moment's rest. You know me, I'm not afraid of death, but I am afraid of tiredness."

Lin Qingyu snorted coldly. "What complete nonsense."

Lu Wancheng had woken up but his body was still extremely weak. Just after saying a few words, his face was already turning deathly pale. Except for liquid food, he vomited whatever else he ate. He subsisted on light rice porridge every day. He couldn't even have the tiniest bite of fish or meat.

Not long ago, Huan Tong, following his instructions, bought a lot of novels from the bookstore on Yongxing Street. Whenever he was awake, he would be leaning against a soft pillow as he read those novels. At night, before going to bed, he would half force Lin Qingyu into listening to him "read a story" until he himself trailed off and drifted to sleep.

On this day, Lu Wancheng was reading a novel when he saw the servants of the Blue Wind Pavilion rummaging through the cabinets in the room. He asked,

“What are they doing?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Looking for something.”

“Of course I know they’re looking for something. I’m not blind — What are they looking for?”

Lin Qingyu said, “The ‘lost’ ledger.”

When recuperating, one must avoid being laden down with worries. Lin Qingyu hadn’t planned on telling Lu Wancheng about the account book. But after thinking about it, Lu Wancheng didn’t even care about his life or death, he probably wouldn’t even spare a thought over this trivial matter.

He couldn’t help being a little curious. Was there be anything that could move Lu Wancheng into caring?

Lin Qingyu briefly recounted what had happened the day before yesterday. Lu Wancheng’s reaction was much bigger than he had expected. There was even a hint of piercing coldness in his eyes. “If you don’t court death, you won’t die. Why is it that some people just can’t understand?” Lu Wancheng pondered for

a moment and then raised his lips in a slight smile. “Doctor Lin, this is a good time for you to fight for your inheritance.”

Hearing this, Lin Qingyu knew that Lu Wancheng had the same idea as he did. “I know.” He said, “Otherwise why do you think I’m letting them look for a non-existent ledger?”

Lu Wancheng sighed, “Haven’t I said it before? We get along really well. How about we create a bond…a bond as sworn brothers? Brothers from different fathers.”

“…No.”

Lu Wancheng was sent coughing from shock. “Cough, cough. — But why?!”

“I’ve already created one bond with you. I don’t intend to have another.” Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Besides, I, for one, don’t think I get along very well with you.”

Lu Wancheng was hit hard and whispered. “I just want to hear you call me ‘Wancheng Gege’. Why is that so hard?”

The servants rummaged through the Blue Wind Pavilion, but they found no trace of the ledger. Lin Qingyu relayed this to Liang Shi. Manager Wang suddenly looked as though the sky had collapsed. “Oh what am I to do! Those

ledgers are confidential and there's only one copy of that account. There's no copy of that page. If something were to go wrong in the future…"

Liang Shi, too, wore a worried frown. She repeatedly confirmed to Lin Qingyu, "Are you sure you've searched every part of the Blue Wind Pavilion? Maybe the servants didn't look carefully?"

"They've searched high and low. The ledger is indeed not in the Blue Wind Pavilion."

Liu Momo could finally raise her eyebrows and sigh. "Losing such an important thing, not only has Shaojun betrayed the Madam's trust but

according to the rules of the Hou Mansion, you must be made to reflect on your actions in the ancestral hall!"

Lin Qingyu asked, "How can the Madam be sure that the ledger was lost in the Blue Wind Pavilion?"

Liu Momo rushed to speak, "It was whole when it sent was sent to the Blue Wind Pavilion but it was missing a page when we took it back! If it wasn't lost in the Blue Wind Pavilion then where could it be?"

Liang Shi thought that Lin Qingyu would still dispute, but he simply nodded. "I see."

For a while, Liang Shi didn't respond. "This…"

"In that case," Lin Qingyu said in a hurry, "This matter was due to my negligence. I hope Madam will forgive me."

The few people exchanged looks. After they got over their astonishment, they all grew somewhat restless, eager to make trouble. Liang Shi pursed her lips.

She had a vague feeling that something was wrong. She said, “Qingyu has already tried very hard to find it. It can’t be helped that it’s missing.”

She was a very picture of a dignified, tolerant and magnanimous mistress.

Liu Momo asked, “Madam, should this matter be told to the Master?”

Lin Qingyu slightly raised his eyes.

Losing a page of an important account book may be considered a major event in the inner house, but it was far from important enough to be seen by Nan’an Hou.

Nan’an Hou was a minister of outstanding merit serving beside the Emperor. His first wife was the biological sister of the Empress herself. He could be considered as first among a hundred ministers. He rarely involved himself with matters of the inner house and Lin Qingyu has seen him only a few times after getting married. The only matters that could be presented before him were major issues that could not be controlled by Liang Shi.

A one-off careless slip by the Shaojun was nothing much. Were Liang Shi to tell Nan’an Hou about it, Nan’an Hou would only think that she was making a fuss. But if Lin Qingyu were to make mistakes one after another and Liang Shi

were to mention this to Nan'an Hou then the source of his displeasure would be the person who made the mistakes.

Liang Shi thought for a while, and said, "The Master has far too many things to handle in the imperial court. He shouldn't have to worry about things at home."

Manager Wang shook his head and sighed, "After all, this is the first time that the Shaojun has been involved with the general affairs of the mansion. It truly makes people worry. It is still with Madam as the mistress of the household that we can…"

In order not to embarrass Lin Qingyu, Liang Shi "considerately" interrupted Manager Wang and said, "Qingyu is the eldest daughter-in-law of the Hou Mansion. If he doesn't help share my worries and burdens, then who else can I count on? If this matter causes trouble in the future, I will take care of it for Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and said, "Thank you, Madam."

Liang Shi sighed and asked the maid to present another account book. "This is the Hou Mansion's account book for the entire winter. Qingyu, take it back with you and sort it through. This time, you must absolutely not lose any pages again."

This time, Lin Qingyu urged Zhang Shiquan to carefully watch over the ledger. Zhang Shiquan didn't dare be the slightest bit neglectful. The account

book would only be out when he was present, and whenever he was away, it would be locked up in the cabinet. On the day that Lin Qingyu was to report to Liang Shi, Zhang Shiquan deliberately counted and confirmed that there were no missing pages before returning the ledger to Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu brought the ledger to the front hall to Liang Shi. Liang Shi ordered someone to serve tea and asked Lin Qingyu to wait a while. She then flipped through the account book in front of him.

"That's strange. Why can't I see last year's charcoal money? Manager Wang, could it be that you didn't record it?"

Wang Guanshi hurriedly said, "As I remember, it should be on page 26."

Lin Qingyu also said, "There is indeed this account. I've seen it."

"Twenty-four, twenty-five…twenty-seven?" Liang Shi's eyes widened, "Why… another page is missing?"

Lin Qingyu frowned. "Impossible."

Liang Shi repeatedly confirmed it. "It's really not here."

"Please look for it carefully, Madam."

Liang Shi's face was drawn down and she threw the account book to Liu Momo. But anyone with a discerning eye could see that she wanted to fling

this account book at Lin Qingyu.

Liang Shi no longer had her usual generosity and kindness and she said coldly, “Since you don’t trust my words — Liu Momo, help Shaojun count.”

Liu Momo quickly flipped through the ledger. “The twenty-sixth page is indeed missing…Manager Wang, how many pages were there in this ledger?”

Wang Guan said, “A total of one hundred and twenty pages.”

Liu Momo counted from beginning to end. “This ledger has only one hundred and nineteen pages. Why is there another page lost!”

Lin Qingyu’s constantly cold expression round finally showed that uneasiness they wanted to see. “How is this possible? Madam, the ledger was not lost in Blue Wind Pavilion.”

“You’ve done it again.” Liang Shi said, sincere and earnest, “Qingyu, I can protect you once, but I can’t protect you again and again.”

Lin Qingyu was silent, his eyes half closed.

The corners of Liang Shi’s lips were silently ticked up and Liu Momo could hardly hold back the smile from appearing on her face. Manager Wang was

just as anxious as last time. “Madam, about the housekeeping, for the sake of the peace of the Hou Mansion, please reconsider! Madam!”

Liang Shi rubbed her forehead. “Perhaps, I shouldn’t have placed such high hopes on you. Wancheng is so ill, you should just stay by his side and take care of him.”

Lin Qingyu finally lowered his head in front of them. “Young Master Hou has his own servants to wholeheartedly take care of him and Qingyu still wishes to manage the mansion’s affairs. I’m asking Madam…to give me another chance.”

Different expressions flashed in Liang Shi’s eyes. Just as she expected, she was right. Lin Qingyu was coming after the Hou Mansion’s property. What a clear and cold beauty but inside, he was unexpectedly filled with worldly treachery. How horrible if she really were to let him take control of the household.

Liang Shi pondered for a long time and she said, as though compromising, “Don’t meddle with the accounts anymore. How about this? The crown prince’s birth mother, Chen Guifei, is about to celebrate her fortieth birthday. How about you handle the selection of her birthday gift?”

Court officials were very particular about giving gifts to each other. Reciprocity was key and so was having worldly wisdom. In recent years, the details of the gifts given by others to the Hou Mansion were all recorded. When it was time to give them gifts in return, it must be carefully weighed based on their official positions as well as the friendship they shared with Nan’an Hou. A little carelessness may arouse suspicion and envy. Even

ordinary officials were like this, what more the imperial concubine-mother of the current crown prince.

Liang Shi has already done so much to set the tone. It was finally time to play the big one.

Lin Qingyu hesitated and said, “I have never had any dealings with the Eastern Palace. I am completely ignorant as to Chen Guifei’s preferences.”

“I have a book that records the rewards that His Highness the Crown Prince and Chen Guifei have bestowed upon Master Hou over the years. You will only need to prepare a commensurate gift.” Liang Shi said, “Remember, His Majesty the Emperor does not like for the Empress and his concubines to be too extravagant. He likes it even less for the crown prince to associate with

powerful ministers. The value of the gift you prepare for Chen Guifei must be equal to the rewards they have given."

In the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lu Wancheng was feeding himself his medicine. Movements slow and leisurely, it took him so very long to drink half his bowl. Watching him, Huan Tong was itching to help him drink it.

Hearing "Shaojun has returned" from outside, Lu Wancheng looked towards the door, waiting for Lin Qingyu to come in. He hurriedly drank down the remaining half of the medicine.

Huan Tong asked, confused, "Why is Young Master Hou so willing to drink his medicine as soon as he sees my family's Young Master?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "The medicine is too bitter so you've got to down it with a bit of eye candy. —— Doctor Lin, how was it?"

Lin Qingyu ignored him. "Huan Tong, go and ask Manager Zhang to come here."

When Zhang Shiquan heard that the ledger was missing another page, he grew quite emotional. "How is that possible? I have confirmed it over and over!"

Lin Qingyu said, "It's very simple, Liang Shi has people within the Blue Wind Pavilion, and they took the ledger at the last minute."

"It's probably Feng Qin," Lu Wancheng said casually, "She is quite loyal to

Liang Shi."

Everyone's eyes flicked and focused on Lu Wancheng.

Lu Wancheng laughed and said, "Why are you all looking at me?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "How do you know?"

"I observed it."

Huan Tong yelled, "How could Young Master Hou not tell us about such an important matter?!"

Lu Wancheng was also surprised. "Liang Shi has been in power within the Nan'an Hou Mansion for many years, and she had been the one to personally select the Blue Wind Pavilion's servants. Except for Hua Lu who is a maid sent

by my maternal grandparents, everyone else would obey Liang Shi. Don't tell me that you didn't know."

The people gathered remained expressionless for a while. Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Thank you, Young Master Hou, for reminding us. We know now."

Huan Tong said fiercely, "I'm going to go and talk some sense into her!"

"No need," Lin Qingyu stopped Huan Tong. "Let her be."

Huan Tong said in disbelief, "Young Master? But why?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "My guess is, there's someone here who wants to do 'something bad'?"

Lin Qingyu did not deny it. "She made the first move."

Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu. In his eyes, was a smile that couldn't be hidden. "It's fine. Doctor Lin also looks beautiful when he's doing 'something bad'."

"Young Master Hou, sleeping haphazardly is fine, but speaking so is not." Huan Tong said seriously, "Our family's Young Master is good-natured and warm-

hearted. He would never do bad things!"

Lin Qingyu: "……"

Lu Wancheng smiled. "He hasn't done it before, but he must have thought about it. In the future, he might do it. Am I right, Doctor Lin?"

Lin Qingyu's heart tightened imperceptibly.

Huan Tong had grown up with him but he didn't know some of the secret thoughts in his mind. Huan Tong thought him a good person. While Lu Wancheng, who had only known him for a few months, seemed to be able to see through him.

He originally thought that once he married into the Hou Mansion, he would have to endure the humiliation in silence and rot in the quagmire. He never thought that he could meet a… close friend and confidant?

Lin Qingyu looked down at a certain someone lying on the bed, clearly ill but relaxed and content. The bottom of his eyes were dark and unclear. Soon after, he smiled softly and said, "Wrong."

Lu Wancheng's coughing symptoms relapsed. He coughed when he was awake and coughed even when he was asleep, waking himself up. It was late into the night, after he'd woken up, that he subconsciously looked towards the screen.

However, he couldn't make out anyone behind it, so he forced himself to sit up. He saw Lin Qingyu standing by the window.

He was standing alone, his figure lonely and cold, looking as though he was caged in light.

For a long while, Lu Wancheng looked at him in a daze. He couldn't help calling out: "Qingyu?"

"Here."

Lu Wancheng asked: "Why aren't you asleep yet?"

Lin Qingyu was silent for a long time before he said, "You said, I look beautiful when I do bad things."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Hey, if you're talking like that, I won't be sleepy anymore."

Lin Qingyu looked back at him and asked softly, "If that 'bad thing' I do is poison people, or even…take the lives of people, would you still think that I look beautiful?"

Lu Wancheng was slightly startled. His breath seemed to hide faint excitement and anticipation. He slowly smiled. "Of course, you'd be beautiful. The way you look when you use poison is the one I like best."

13

Chapter 13

Dayu's present crown prince was the Emperor's eldest son. It has been three years since he has become the master of the Eastern Palace. His biological mother was Chen Guifei, who has dominated the six palaces for many years and whose position was tantamount to being the second empress. This time,

on her fortieth birthday, all the noble ladies would go to the palace to offer her their well wishes and present to her their gifts.

The manager of the mansion's storehouse sent a list and said, "All the things in the mansion are listed here. As Madam has instructed, asking Shaojun to please select a suitable birthday gift."

Lin Qingyu gave it a cursory glance and asked, "The booklet the Madam gave me said that the Eastern Palace had rewarded Master Hou with a pair of sheep-fat white jade Ruyi. Why is it not in the storehouse?"

The manager said, "Answering Shaojun, this pair of Jade Ruyi was sent by the Madam to the War Minister's mansion to congratulate his son on his wedding."

Lin Qingyu asked again, "And where is the thousand-year ginseng given by Chen Guifei?"

The manager smiled and said, "Naturally, it was used to help the Young Master."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "I see. You can leave now. Before Madam enters the palace tomorrow, I will have a gift prepared for her."

Liang Shi's only requirement for the gift was that it be of equal value. The Nan'an Hou Mansion can neither be lacking in respect to Chen Guifei but neither could they be seen as trying to ingratiate themselves to her. Especially

since the Nan'an Hou Mansion and the Empress even had a relationship by marriage. Things were becoming more and more delicate.

The Empress actually had a son who was born mentally challenged. He was unable to inherit the throne and was also unable to obtain the Emperor's favor. All this time, he has been kept in the temporary imperial residence. The Empress has always been anxious about her son and naturally, she held a grudge against this mother and son pair. Although the Empress was far less favored than Chen Guifei, she was still the mother of the country. While giving

a gift to Chen Guifei, the Nan'an Hou Mansion still had to keep in mind the honor of the palace. The various twists and turns defied simple explanation.

Lin Qingyu first selected a batch of gifts from the list, and ordered the servants to move them into the Blue Wind Pavilion to let him go through them and choose.

Lu Wancheng saw that the room was filled with gift boxes of all sizes and asked, "What are these?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Chen Guifei's birthday gift candidates."

"Chen Guifei?" Lu Wancheng had a rare frown on his face, "The crown prince's concubine mother?"

"That's her."

Lu Wancheng's face changed slightly, "When did you get involved with the Eastern Palace?"

Lin Qingyu told Lu Wancheng about Liang Shi asking him to prepare the gift. Lu Wancheng still seemed uneasy, and asked, "So you won't be going to the palace or seeing the crown prince?"

"No." Lin Qingyu said suspiciously, "You don't ever care about other things but how come whenever the Eastern Palace is mentioned, you have such a big

reaction?"

Lu Wancheng hesitated for a moment, and smiled, "That's the current crown prince, the future emperor. Is he not worth me making a senseless fuss over?"

Lin Qingyu said, "The Empress is your aunt and the prince's dimu. Looking at it from that point of view, the crown prince is still your cousin."

Lu Wancheng snorted. "I do not wish to have this greasiest of the greasiest as my cousin."

The topic about the Eastern Palace ended here. Lu Wancheng was a bit preoccupied but he still didn't forget to remind Lin Qingyu, "Since the Liang

Shi dares to use Chen Guifei's matter to create an issue, she probably feels that the time is about right."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Don't worry, Young Master Hou. I do have my own sense of proportion."

The next day, Liang Shi got up an hour earlier than usual. Liu Momo waited on her to change into her court clothes. She asked, "Which courtyard did Master Hou stay in last night?"

Liu Momo said, "Pan Yiniang's courtyard."

Liang Shi's expression sank. "It's her again."

Liu Momo persuaded, "Pan Shi comes from a humble background and even her womb failed to live up to expectation. She is not worth Madam getting angry over. It will only be giving her face."

"That's true." Liang Shi looked at the woman in the mirror, still attractive though getting on in the years. She said, "Master Hou should be coming for breakfast soon. Go to the Blue Wind Pavilion and invite him to come here."

No matter which concubine's courtyard Nan'an Hou stayed in for the night, he would always have breakfast with his wife the next day and listen to her talk about some of the mansion's affairs. He would not involve himself in the

household's affairs, but he had to at least keep abreast of what has been happening.

During the meal, Liang Shi mentioned the matter of Chen Guifei's gift. Nan'an Hou said. "This may seem like a trivial matter, but in actuality it has big implications. Where is the birthday gift you prepared? Show me."

At this time, the servant came in and announced, "Master, Madam, Shaojun is here."

Liang Shi said with a smile, "Speaking frankly to Master Hou, there are many things that need to be done to run the household. I am getting on in the years and it is inevitable that I am unable to do as much as I'd wish. I assigned some things to Qingyu to take care of. As a matter of fact, he has been taking care of the accounts for a period of time. I have also instructed him to handle the matter of Chen Guifei's birthday gift. He is here now presumably just for this matter. There is still quite some time before the morning court. Why not stay a while and see what he has prepared?"

Nan'an Hou nodded. "Let him come in."

Lin Qingyu walked in, followed by Feng Qin and Huan Tong. One was holding a book, and the other was holding an exquisite gift box. He greeted the two of

them in accordance with the rules. Nan'an Hou looked at the gift box and said, "Is this the gift you prepared for Chen Guifei?"

"Yes. Asking Madam and Master Hou to please take a look." Lin Qingyu gestured and Feng Qin presented the gift box, her hands trembling slightly.

Looking at the shape of the gift box, it seemed to be something long. Nan'an Hou opened it and took a look. It turned out to be a well-rolled painting.

Nan'an Hou ordered someone to unfurl the painting. His face suddenly changed and he got up in anger. "Impudent!"

Liang Shi pressed down on the corners of her lips. She stood up with him and said in disbelief, "This painting was made by a master of the Shu Dynasty five hundred years ago. This is an heirloom passed down in Master Hou's family. How can you take it to give as a gift?!"

"This painting is priceless. His Majesty loves this painting very much. He has ordered me numerous times to bring this painting to the palace so that we may admire it together. It is because of the solicitude he shows to his ministers that even when I offered to give this to him as tribute, he never accepted it. And now, you were going to take it to Chen Guifei — the crown prince's concubine mother!" Nan'an Hou slammed his first against the table. Towering with rage,

he said, “There is nothing his Majesty fears more than ministers getting too close to the crown prince. You clearly know what calamity you nearly caused!”

Lin Qingyu held back his gaze and said, “Qingyu wouldn’t dare.”

“You wouldn’t dare?” Nan’an Hou was already furious. “Who does not know that the son of the Imperial Hospital’s pan guan is matchlessly intelligent and exceptionally clever? I think you did this intentionally to put the Nan’an Hou Mansion in danger!”

Liang Shi said, fearful at what might have happened, “Fortunately, Master Hou looked at it beforehand. Otherwise, in the future, if his Majesty were to see this painting at Chen Guifei’s, who knows what sort of suspicions he would have regarding Master Hou and the crown prince’s relationship.”

Liang Shi glanced at Liu Momo, signaling to her that it was time her to add oil and vinegar as she was wont to do. Unexpectedly, Liu Momo’s face turned

flustered. Her figure and posture was extremely unsightly. She asked in a low voice, “What’s wrong with you?”

Liu Momo whispered, “I think I was bitten by some bug, and my body is unbearably itchy.”

What was this compared to the critical juncture they were facing? Liang Shi said, displeased, “Master Hou is still here. Pay attention to etiquette.”

Liu Momo forced herself to endure. “Yes.”

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “Master Hou, I have already married into the Hou Mansion. There is no retreat for me. Should the Nan’an Hou Mansion run into misfortune, it will be difficult for me to escape responsibility. The reason why I chose this painting is because of the Madam’s command.”

Liang Shi’s eyes widened and she exclaimed, “What nonsense are you talking about!”

“It was Madam who said that the gift to be given to Chen Guifei must be of equal value to the rewards she has bestowed.”

Although Nan’an Hou and Liang Shi were not husband and wife by the first marriage, they have been sharing the same bed for many years. Lin Qingyu was just a daughter-in-law who he rarely saw. At this moment, he naturally

believed Liang Shi. “What she said was right. You do indeed need only to prepare a gift of equal value. But then what did you do?!”

Lin Qingyu said, “The crown prince once bestowed a pair of sheep-fat white jade Ruyi to Master Hou. This too is a relic from the previous dynasty and could be considered priceless. Its worth is equal to this painting.”

“What sheep-fat white jade?” Nan’an Hou said sternly, “His Royal Highness the crown prince has never given me anything of the sort.”

Liang Shi thought intently. “I don’t remember such a thing either.”

Lin Qingyu frowned. “He hasn’t? But it was written in the booklet Madam gave me. — Huan Tong.”

Huan Tong presented the book. Nan’an Hou quickly scanned through what was written and his eyes grew colder. He threw the book to Lin Qingyu. “Look for yourself. Where is the sheep-fat white jade you said!”

Lin Qingyu tilted his head to avoid it. He picked up the ledger and read through it. “Indeed…it’s not here.”

Nan’an Hou pointed to Lin Qingyu and said, “What else do you have to say!”

Liu Momo was still struggling with the abnormality of her body and she couldn’t get a word out. Liang Shi had no choice but to say herself, “Qingyu,

just what is going on with you? You lost the pages of the ledger twice and today…oh."

Nan'an Hou said, "The ledger? What ledger?"

Liang Shi said, "It is no big matter. There is no need for Master Hou to concern himself about it."

"Tell me!"

Liang Shi had no other choice. She was forced to tell him everything regarding the ledgers.

Nan'an Hou was even more furious when he heard this. He decided that Lin Qingyu had done everything deliberately. "Bring me the rod!"

Lin Qingyu swept his eyes over everyone and said slowly, "There is no sheep-fat white jade Ruyi in the booklet, but I clearly remember that there was. Why is that? I also remember that there wasn't a single page missing from either of

the two ledgers but when it got to the Madam, they were missing a page each. Why is that?"

Liang Shi blurted out, "Naturally, it is because of your improper care."

"My improper care?" Lin Qingyu smiled softly, "Could it be that someone deliberately took those pages away?"

"Qingyu, matters have already reached this point and you still want to implicate others?" Liang Shi shook his head, "With such poor character, you are not worthy of Wancheng, let alone being Shaojun of the Hou Mansion!"

Just as she finished speaking these words, a thud was heard. Liu Momo, who'd been standing to one side, suddenly fell down. The crazed woman writhed on the ground, tearing her clothes, ravings spewing from her mouth. It was terribly frightful.

Before anyone could react, Feng Qin behind Lin Qingyu also fell twitching. She was a girl after all and she bit her lip, trying her hardest to refrain from

pulling her clothes. However, she kept hitting the ground with her head. Boom boom boom, like a death knell hurrying her to her death.

Everyone present was terribly scared. Several of the servant girls screamed in fear. Liang Shi who was closest to Liu Momo froze and couldn't even move. She stretched out her hand and said in horror, "Ma-Master Hou…"

Lin Qingyu said, "The pages of the ledger and the booklet went missing in the Blue Wind Pavilion. So naturally, this was done by someone of the Blue Wind Pavilion. In order to catch this person, Young Master Hou ordered me to expose the page where the sheep-fat white jade Ruyi was written to a special type of poison. Once the skin comes in contact with this poison, one's whole body will be itchy and covered in sores. Although it poses no threat to one's life, one might just wish they were dead instead. Before that, I repeatedly warned the servants against touching the booklet the Madam sent. That someone from the Blue Wind Pavilion has been poisoned is to be expected," Lin Qingyu paused and glanced lightly at Liang Shi, "But I didn't expect that Liu Momo, Madam's most trusted aide, would also be poisoned."

Nan'an Hou was a wise man. Stringing together the previous "coincidences", he already understood. He turned his head to look Liang Shi. Liang Shi was dumbfounded. "Master Hou, I don't know anything. I don't know what's going on…" Hitting upon a plan in desperation, she retorted with a countercharge.

“Lin Shi must have deliberately poisoned them to frame me! Lin Shi, how could you possibly have let me down! You have resorted to such cruelty!”

Lin Qingyu sneered. He walked up to Feng Qin, and looking down at her, asked, “It’s unbearable, isn’t it?”

Feng Qin had bitten her lips into bleeding. She struggled to say, “Shao-shaojun, please…”

“I can give you both the antidote, but I want to know the whereabouts of those missing pages, understand?”

Liu Momo had already scratched her sleeves into shreds, revealing a large part of her arms covered with sores. It was a ghastly sight and it sent a little maid who saw it, retching. When she heard the word “antidote”, she couldn’t attend to anything else. “Madam– Madam had me burn them…”

Liang Shi shook her head. Still quibbling, “No, Master Hou! I didn’t…Lin Shi, this, this is a confession under torture! You can’t believe them, Master Hou!”

Lin Qingyu said, “If Master Hou is unconvinced, you can question the Manager Wang of the accounting office. He hasn’t been poisoned yet and he is

sober. With Master Hou's impartial and incorruptible means, you will surely be able to find out the truth."

Nan'an Hou closed his eyes and said, "Come and drag these two crazy women away."

After Feng Qin and Liu Momo were taken away, the room grew silent. The servants were afraid to even breathe too hard. Until the steward of the Hou Mansion reminded, "Master Hou, you should go to court. And… Madam, too, should head to the palace."

After such a commotion, Liang Shi's hair bun was scattered and her makeup was also spent. The mistress of the household cut a very sorry figure and she had lost face.

Nan'an Hou said, voice low, "Go quickly and freshen up. Choose a gift to give to Chen Guifei. As for the rest, we will talk about it when I return home." After speaking, he walked away.

After Nan'an Hou came back from the palace, he personally and privately questioned Manager Wang of the accounting office. No one knew all the facts and what had actually happened. The people of the mansion only knew that the Madam knelt all night in the ancestral hall and fell ill the next day. In order

to let her recover from her illness, the Master handed over the affairs of the mansion to Lin Shi Shaojun and Pan Shi Yiniang.

The results of this matter were not much different from what Lin Qingyu expected. Nan'an Hou paid particular importance to face and Liang Shi was his wife, after all. On the surface, he would not do anything to her. But everyone knew that the power in the Hou Mansion was about to change.

After this incident, Lu Wancheng's body gradually recovered, returning to the point where he could get out of bed. The medicine he drank every day also changed. Hua Lu gave him the decoction and smelling it, he could tell that it wasn't his usual medicine. "Doctor Zhang changed his prescription?"

Hua Lu replied, "No, this is Shaojun's medicine."

Lu Wancheng heard these words and suddenly sprayed out the medicine he had just taken. "Puff——"

Lin Qingyu came into the room just in time to see this scene. Laughing, he said, "You can't even drink medicine anymore?"

Lu Wancheng had a coughing fit and Hua Lu was busy cleaning up again. Lin Qingyu never showed mercy with his words, but he walked to the bed and sat down, stroking Lu Wancheng's back, mollifying him.

Lu Wancheng smelled the very faint smell of parchment and ink on his body, mixed with the fragrance of medicine. He seemed like some medicine-picking

immortal straight out of some book.

Because Lu Wancheng was too lazy, too lazy to do anything, too lazy that when he does things he often ends up in a daze and finds himself observing the people around him, he has mastered the ability to weigh a person's words and observe their facial expressions. For example, now, he could sense that Lin Qingyu was in a bad mood. The feeling of coldness surrounding his whole body could make people retreat three day's march.

He didn't dare be rash. He asked cautiously, "Qingyu, why are you changing my medicine?"

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "Why do you think?"

Lu Wancheng waved at Hua Lu to leave and then asked him with a low smile, "Do you think I'm taking my sweet time dropping dead?"

Lin Qingyu sneered. "Yes."

Lu Wancheng let out an "Oh" and picked up the medicine bowl, drinking down all the medicine in it.

Lin Qingyu's brows furrowed slightly. "And why did you do that?"

Lu Wancheng licked the corner of his lips and said, "If you really wanted to poison me, you wouldn't have waited until now, let alone let Hua Lu know

about changing the prescription. You think Doctor Zhang's prescription is no good, so you changed it to a better one for me."

Lin Qingyu suddenly stood up. "You think you're so clever. Drink it if you want; don't drink it if you don't."

Lu Wancheng grabbed the hem of his clothes to prevent him from leaving. "Are you angry again for the umpteenth time?"

"No. Seeing you puts me in a bad mood, that's all."

Lu Wancheng earnestly thought back on what he had done recently. Innocent and confused, he asked, "What did I do wrong?"

Lin Qingyu remained silent as he thought.

Lu Wancheng was right. He has never said that he wanted to live longer. That he would not be able to participate in this year's Imperial Medical Office's examination was because he himself had momentarily been overcome with a bout of soft-heartedness, of foolishness.

But if he missed the exam this year, he could still take the exam three years later. But Lu Wancheng only had this little bit of time left. When a person dies, there's nothing left.

Lin Qingyu's tone was a little slow, "This prescription was given by my father. I made improvements according to your situation. It can't save your life, but it

can make you live for half a year longer and make your last days less painful. When the time come… you won't cut such a sorry figure."

He has met many people driven to the brink of death because of illness. No matter how much dignity they had before, when that time came, none of them looked very good. They could not accomplish their day to day activities by themselves. They had to rely on others for everything; lean as a rake, ashen and beaten, waiting until their oil ran out.

People like Lu Wancheng shouldn't wither away in such torment.

However, Lu Wancheng didn't care whether he died in torment or not. "You said…I'll live half a year longer?"

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes, not looking at him. "Yes."

Lu Wancheng's eyes moved slightly. His Adam's apple rolled up and down. "Qingyu."

He called out his name and fell silent. It made Lin Qingyu feel embarrassed.

"Don't get me wrong." Lin Qingyu said, "'Human life is the most important thing. The virtue of saving a life is worth more than a thousand gold.' Since I'm

practicing medicine, I can't stand by and watch an innocent die without trying to save them."

When Lu Wancheng spoke again, his voice was a little muffled, "But, you can't save me."

"I know. But as long as I try my best, I will have a clear conscience in the future."

Lu Wancheng laughed, his lips curled slightly. His eyes were bright, even beautiful, but the words he said were still infuriating "Aiyaya, has the vicious and merciless beauty turned bent for me?"

Lin Qingyu couldn't hide his disdain and refused to concede. "Young Master Hou really does think too highly of himself."

Lu Wancheng straightened up, leaned close to Lin Qingyu's ear and said softly, "Qingyu, thank you."

Lin Qingyu wasn't used to him suddenly approaching him like that. The expression on his face, cold as icicles under the eaves, was suddenly on the verge of collapse. He said, "This medicine, will you drink it or not?"

"If I don't drink it, wouldn't I be betraying your good intentions? By the way," Lu Wancheng seemed to think of something important, "Would drinking this

medicine enable me to carry you?"

Lin Qingyu didn't understand why Lu Wancheng was so entangled over this matter. He raised his eyebrows slightly, "You really want to be able to carry me?"

Lu Wancheng nodded. "I really want to."

A sneer hung on Lin Qingyu's lips. "You should just give up on that idea. It's impossible for you in this lifetime."

Lu Wancheng held up the medicine bowl while whispering in a low voice. "… Then what the fart am I even drinking this for?"

14

Chapter 14

After Lin Qingyu got half of the power in the household, people came to him in a steady stream every day.

The story of Shaojun poisoning people spread throughout mansion. Everyone got to understand what a “femme fatale” was and they looked at Shaojun with awe. From matters as big as dispensing the mansion’s monthly allowance to matters as small as what kind of flowers to be plant in the yard, no one dared to make any arbitrary decision at all.

Lin Qingyu was pestered beyond endurance. He has never been interested in the general affairs of the mansion. Small things like what flowers to grow and what snacks to prepare in each room, he left to Pan Shi to decide upon. As for other important matters, it would be best if he could maintain a hold over those.

Lin Qingyu found a certain someone lying on a rocking chair with his eyes closed, listening to the rain. He instructed, “Find me a few more trustworthy stewards to help manage the household.”

Lu Wancheng opened his eyes and teased, “Oh? I seem to remember that you used to be quite averse to this kind of approach — ‘You can’t always rely on

others for everything. Then, when you're too lazy to eat, to sleep, or to marry a wife and make children, will you also have someone deal with it for you?'"

Lin Qingyu paused, and calmly said, "That was one situation and this is quite another."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "This matter is easy to handle. I'll just write another letter to my grandfather."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Alright, go write it."

"Then help me grind the ink."

Lu Wancheng had just said it jokingly and offhand, thinking that he would be ruthlessly rejected by Lin Qingyu once again. Unexpectedly, Lin Qingyu merely hesitated for a moment, then said, "Alright."

Lu Wancheng was immediately overwhelmed by having been bestowed with this favor.

In the study room, Lu Wancheng stood in front of the window railing, holding a pen in his hand. Lin Qingyu stood quietly on one side, personally grinding the ink for him.

The ink gave off a dense fragrance, but Lu Wancheng could still make out the light medicinal fragrance on Lin Qingyu's body. He couldn't help wondering

when his sense of smell became so good.

It was spring and rain was plentiful. Though it had been raining for several days already, it still showed no signs of stopping. Outside the window, the spring rain drizzled, natural and fascinating, like entwined ties of love.

Lu Wancheng wrote very slowly. It seemed that he didn't write often, but his brush work was excellent. Letters were private things and Lin Qingyu didn't read it deliberately, but did catch sight of it inadvertently.

They say that who a person is, is reflected in their calligraphy. Lu Wancheng's words were energetic, like moving clouds and flowing water; free, easy and smooth. It was hard to imagine that they came from the hands of someone chronically ill.

After writing a few words, Lu Wancheng was struck with a bout of laziness. "Ah, my hands are sore. I'm so tired."

Lin Qingyu said, "You can sit down and write."

"That won't work. If you write while sitting down, it won't come out smooth and elegant at all."

Lin Qingyu: "……"

Huan Tong came in to deliver snacks and was met with the sight of Young Master Hou writing while his own family's Young Master acted as " red sleeves

adding fragrance ". It gave him quite the shock and it took some time to remember what he was doing there. "Young Master, the kitchens have delivered plum cakes."

Lin Qingyu said, "You can just set it down there."

Huan Tong put the plum cakes on the table. When he saw Lu Wancheng's writing, he said in surprise, "Young Master Hou is so lazy, but his handwriting is actually so beautiful!"

Lu Wancheng said modestly, "You flatter me, you flatter me. It's nothing exceptional."

Lin Qingyu said slowly, "Looking at your handwriting, it seems that you've meticulously practiced it."

"That's right."

Practicing one's calligraphy is not something done in a day. Lu Wancheng's calligraphy must have been practiced for at least several years. Lin Qingyu couldn't help but questioned, "If you're already complaining of a sore hand after just writing a few words, how could you have possibly practiced writing for leisure?"

"Oh, obviously, I was forced. I was too active as a child. Mama heard that practicing calligraphy could bring calm, so she paid handsomely for calligraphy tutors to teach me how to write and read ancient Chinese." Lu

Wancheng lowered his eyes, his expression a mixture of reminiscence and pain, “Mama was eager to be the best in everything. It wasn’t enough for her that she be first, she demanded that I too be a master of the four arts. I had to get first place in everything. It was so pitiful at the time. If it wasn’t one class, it was another. I couldn’t even get enough sleep…”

Huan Tong said sympathetically, “Young Master Hou must have been so miserable! You’re already so sick but you were tossed about like that. Even us servants have it better.

Lin Qingyu was indifferent. “He is talking nonsense.”

Huan Tong’s eyes widened: “Huh?”

“When did you ever hear him call Liang Shi “mama”?”

Huan Tong scratched his head. “Ah, that’s right.”

Lu Wancheng didn’t refute. He smiled and said, “Ah, I found out.”

Halfway through the letter, there was a sentence for which Lu Wancheng was unsure of the grammar. And so, he stopped writing and pondered. He pondered and pondered until his thoughts started to stray, his eyes gradually slackened and even the way he held the brush changed. But despite the careless

way he held the brush, in a burst of power, he wrapped his fingers around the brush and finished it from beginning to end, all in one go.

In an instant, brush and ink flew wildly. The master-servant pair who was standing beside him received some damage. Lin Qingyu got off relatively easy, suffering only a few ink stains. It was Huan Tong who suffered more with a streak of ink marring half of his face. Moreover, because he'd been caught in

surprise, he had his mouth open and unfortunately, got to have a taste of ink. Once he came back to his senses, he immediately “pah pah pah”-ed.

Lu Wancheng realized his mistake and quickly put down the brush, apologizing to them both, “I’m sorry, for a moment there, I forgot that this is a brush dipped in ink…”

Lin Qingyu said devoid of expression, “Can you act like a normal person?”

Lu Wancheng felt a little like laughing. But doing so at this time, would really be too unkind. He held back a smile and said, “It really wasn’t intentional… Here, let me wipe it for you.” He said, raising his hand.

Those few ink stains happened to fall under Lin Qingyu’s eyes, mixing with his tear-shaped mole. Just as Lu Wancheng reached out, Lin Qingyu blinked. Long eyelashes, like butterfly wings, brushed lightly over Lu Wancheng’s fingertips.

Slightly ticklish and soft.

Lu Wancheng’s hand paused. He actually froze, and even his breathing stagnated.

Lin Qingyu didn’t notice his strange actions. He pushed his hand away and said in a cool tone, “Are hands what you use to wipe away ink stains?”

“Oh, yes.” Lu Wancheng recovered his senses. He turned and ordered, “Huan

Tong, get a kerchief and wipe it for your Young Master."

Huan Tong argued, "I haven't gotten all the ink out of my mouth yet!"

Hua Lu brought over some warm water, and Lin Qingyu used a wet handkerchief to wipe his face. At this time, Pan Shi's personal main, Han Qiao, came to Lin Qingyu and said, "Shaojun, our yiniang requests that you go to the front hall."

Lin Qingyu said, "I see."

Pan Shi was woman and he was a man, distinction was made between them. Although they shared the running of the household, they rarely met each other and would simply let the servants deliver messages. Pan Shi's sudden invitation meant that there was something that needed to be discussed in person.

Lin Qingyu said to Lu Wancheng, "I'm going out for a bit. You should finish writing that letter and send someone to the Guo Gong Mansion as soon as possible."

Lu Wancheng absent-mindedly agreed. Going back to the window, he looked as Lin Qingyu's opened an umbrella under the curtain of rain. He looked down at his fingertips, chuckled and said to himself, "…what the hell?"

Pan Shi had also been a lady of an official's family. It was a pity that her family had suffered a reversal of fortune. In order to make a living, she has to submit to being a concubine. Her family had little power and she had borne no sons.

That she was able to receive favor from Nan'an Hou was not only because of her appearance, but more so because of her quiet temperament. She didn't fight or contend and she never talked indiscreetly in front of Nan'an Hou. The things in court were already disturbing enough. When Nan'an Hou returned to the mansion, he just wanted to a bit of peace and Pan Shi's was undoubtedly the best place to go.

In order to avoid suspicion, Lin Qingyu and Pan Shi brought a lot of servants with them whenever they met, and this time was no different. Lin Qingyu had never liked the people in the Nan'an Hou's mansion, but because of the wedding gift Pan Shi had given him and Lu Wancheng, and also because of the medicinal plasters she had given when he got a sprain, he did not loathe this person; he was simply indifferent.

Lin Qingyu patiently exchanged a few polite words with her, and said, "If Yiniang has anything important, you can just say it directly."

Pan Shi nodded and said, "It will be Qingming in a few days. The Lu family's hometown is in Lin'an, and the presentation of offerings is all handled by the Lu Clan's branch family. To show filial piety Master Hou keeps two ever-burning altar lamps for his parents in Changsheng Temple in the outskirts of the capital. In the past, during this time, Master Hou's wife would go to Changsheng Temple to pray for the ancestors' blessing and protection.

However, Madam is still yet to recuperate from her illness, and Master Hou…" Pan stopped and said nothing more.

Since Chen Guifei's birthday, Liang Shi has rarely appeared in front of others. They say she's in recuperation, but she was actually being confined. Nan'an Hou has always been in a high position. He was proud and arrogant and couldn't bear the shame of being the target of deception by her schemes. Liang Shi's fault could not be called small but neither could it be called big. However,

since she violated Nan'an Hou's taboo, she was naturally made to suffer a lot of hardships.

Lin Qingyu said, "This being the case, I will have to trouble Yiniang to pray for our blessings."

Pan shook her head and said, "I am just a concubine. I cannot take the Madam's place to light the incense. You are the Hou Mansion's officially wedded Shaojun. Except for the Madam, only you can go."

Lin Qingyu declined to comment. If they had him go and light incense for the ancestors of the Lu family, he might just directly extinguish the ever-burning lamps that Nan'an Hou has kept burning for more than ten years.

However, it would be nice if he could take this opportunity to visit the Changsheng Temple and pray for his family.

Lin Qingyu said, "Alright, I will arrange it."

Pan Shi said, "The road has been made slippery by the rain. Young Master can wait for the rain to stop before heading out."

Lin Qingyu nodded and took his leave. Pan Shi watched him leave and then

suddenly said, “Shaojun, please wait.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Is there anything else?”

Pan walked forward and bowed to Lin Qingyu, saying, “Ten years ago, I had yet to enter the mansion and I lived with my mother. We made a living by washing and weaving. That winter had been bitterly cold, and my mother had caught a bad cold. It wouldn’t heal even after many days and she was dying. However, with but four bare walls for a house, we couldn’t afford to pay for medical treatment and medicine. I took a few copper coins and begged for medicine at the Ever Bright and Harmonious drug store but was harassed by a passing lecher. At that time, Lin Pan Yuan was there selecting medicinal herbs. Fortunately, he came to my rescue. Lin Pan Yuan not only followed me to see my mother at home, but also paid for the medicine for us. He…is our lifesaver.” Pan Shi was also choked with sobs by the time she finished.

Lin Qingyu smiled faintly, and said, “This was indeed something my father would have done.”

Pan Shi turned to the side and wiped her tears. She said in embarrassment, “I’ve let Shaojun see something embarrassing. I just want to say, if Shoajun has

any need of me in the future, I will do my best to help Shoajun in return for this life-saving grace. ”

Lin Qingyu’s slightly cold voice warmed up a bit, “Yiniang is too polite.”

Back to the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lin Qingyu ordered people to prepare for the Qingming trip. But the rain still showed no signs of stopping. With the weather not having cleared up for a long time, the house became damp. Stepping outside, you were met with rain everywhere. The peoples’ moods were also inexplicably low.

Lu Wancheng was depressed for a few days. When Lin Qingyu asked him what was wrong, he didn’t say anything and just kept sighing. Having asked once

and not getting an answer, Lin Qingyu didn't bother asking again and simply let him do what he wanted.

On this day, Lu Wancheng was once again dazed in bed. Hua Lu brought his medicine. When she called him to take it, he didn't respond, looking as though he had nothing left to live for.

Hua Lu turned to Lin Qingyu for help. "Shaojun, this…"

Lin Qingyu said, "I'll do it. You can go."

After Hua Lu left, Lin Qingyu walked to the bed. Towering over Lu Wancheng, he asked, "What's the matter with you?"

Lu Wancheng: "……"

Lin Qingyu showed his displeasure and threatened, "If you won't say anything, I'm going to have Huan Tong take away your quilt everyday at the break of dawn."

Lu Wancheng choked. "I'm already like this, can't you be a little sympathetic?"

"Like what?"

Lu Wancheng hid his face with his hands, and said in agony, "I'm f*cking… it

seems like I'm no good anymore."

Lin Qingyu:?

"What do you mean by 'no good'?"

It seemed that Lu Wancheng found it hard to speak about it. "That there is no good. In the past, every morning, as long as I wake up… you know."

Lin Qingyu: "……"

Lu Wancheng looked down at his waist, incomparably distressed. "These past few days, it just won't get up."

Lin Qingyu said, "Oh, that's normal."

Lu Wancheng suddenly raised his head. "Normal?"

In order to improve the prescription, I added a lot of Pueraria lobata, pseudo-ginseng type herbs to your medicine." Lin Qingyu downplayed it. He sounded like he was talking about what they were having for dinner tonight. "Long-

term use of such drugs will cause… some effects on men. You don't use it anyway. You shouldn't care about that."

Don't use it?

Shouldn't care? ?

Lu Wancheng almost spewed out a mouthful of blood. For a while, he didn't know how to refute such rebellious words. If he got angry with Lin Qingyu, he might provoke him into anger and he'll still have to coax him later. Maybe he

could reason things out — But as everyone knows, a great beauty would never reason things out with a mere mortal.

Lu Wancheng held back for a while, before he said, “I have no use for it. But whether I use it or not is not the same as whether I can use it or not.”

Lin Qingyu begged to differ. “This is a matter of life and death. Can you pack away your useless ego? Living half a year more is more important than anything.”

Lu Wancheng was in his death throes. “But…”

Lin Qingyu said impatiently, “No buts. Young Master Hou, as a patient, the only thing you have to do is to follow the doctor’s advice — drink your medicine.”

Lu Wancheng looked down at the dark decoction. He wanted to say something but stopped, wanted to say something but stopped. Finally, he gave Lin Qingyu a thumbs up, and something Lin Qingyu couldn’t understand popped out of his mouth: “…So badass.”

Translator’s notes: For those concerned, Young Master Hou’s….ahem, condition down there is reversible.

15

Chapter 15

Recently, the atmosphere in the Blue Wind Pavilion was different from usual. The Hwamei no longer sang. The Mynah no longer called out “Doctor Lin” and Young Master Hou…withered.

His wilting was not only physical, but also emotional. There was no more bird walking, no flower viewing, no arrow throwing. His eyes were closed; his body, paralyzed. He was cut off from all worldly desires.

All the remaining servants of the Blue Wind Pavilion liked their master very much. Young Master Hou was charming and generous. He often found fun things which he enjoyed with the servants. With his wilting, the courtyard became gloomier and gloomier, and not the slightest cheer could be heard.

Hua Lu and Huan Tong were the closest to the masters and they felt the changes most acutely. They all agreed that Young Master Hou and Shaojun seemed to be quarreling. And now, they were both ignoring each other.

Huan Tong was certain. “Young Master Hou must have provoked our family’s Young Master.” Based on his observation, Young Master Hou was unable to control his tongue in front of his family’s Young Master, causing his Young

Master to frown. He would then pull at his sleeve with a smile and apologize. Huan Tong couldn't understand what was with that.

Hua Lu sighed, "They say husband and wife quarrel at the head of bed and make peace at the foot. I hope they reconcile soon."

Huan Tong bared the truth with one remark. "Though they've never slept on the same bed."

Lin Qingyu knew that Lu Wancheng was depressed, but he really didn't understand why. That he hadn't given advance notice to Lu Wancheng about the side effects of the medicine was his slip, but if he didn't use this medicine and instead, used the one originally written on his father's prescription, Lu Wancheng would have to suffer unbearable pain after taking the medicine. Compared to that, what was a little erectile dysfunction? The most important point was, even if Lu Wancheng could get it up, he was in no position to make use of it — He himself said that he was too lazy to move.

If only Lu Wancheng could quickly realize it and cheer up.

After raining for almost half a month, a musty smell appeared in the study, affecting people's mood to read. Lin Qingyu prepared some incense which had the effect of removing dampness. He asked the servants to light them in each

room. He then ordered several servants to take out the moldy books from the bookcases and spread them out in front of the fire to dry.

The study was bustling with activity. Lin Qingyu was in no mood to read and simply joined the servants in cleaning. He casually opened a copy of "Lin'an Travel Notes" and saw comments written in ink in the margins. He asked, "This is Young Master Hou's book?"

Hua Lu looked over and said, "Yes, Young Master Hou read this book all the time last year. He even told me he wanted to go to Lin'an to see the scenery south of the Yangtze River."

Lin Qingyu frowned, "Was he also the one who wrote these notes?"

"Most certainly."

Lin Qingyu took a closer look at that line of characters. The more he looked at it, the more he felt that something was wrong.

The characters in Lu Wancheng's earlier letter to Wen Guogong were similar in shape and appearance to his calligraphy last year. But it didn't look at all alike in spirit. It looked like…like he was deliberately imitating it. Of course, the shape of the characters could be imitated, but a character's grace and

charm reflected a person's mood and character. No matter how similar the "shape" there would always be a difference in "spirit".

Lin Qingyu pondered for a long time and asked, "Is Young Master Hou up yet?"

Hua Lu said, "He got up half an hour ago. Master Guo Gong has ordered for a few maids and stewards to be sent over here. The Eldest Young Master is talking with them in the main room."

Lin Qingyu walked to the door and was about to enter when he heard Lu Wancheng's voice. "You are the people sent by my maternal grandparents. I can trust you. I think there's no need for me to say it. You should know what to do."

An unfamiliar voice said, "Young Master Hou need not worry. We will do our very best to share Young Master Hou's worries and tribulations."

"Wrong. It's not my worries you'll be sharing, it's the Shaojun's." Lu Wancheng said lightly, "I won't be able to last until next winter anyway. When I go, Shaojun will go back to the Lin Residence. It is my wish that when he leaves, he be able to bring most of the Hou Mansion's family property with him

without the Hou Master and Madam making things difficult for him — Do you understand what I mean?"

After a short silence, several people said in unison, "Young Master Hou and Shaojun serve as our sole guide."

Lu Wancheng was quite satisfied. "After the matter is done, you will be handsomely rewarded."

Lin Qingyu felt his heart constrict somewhat. He couldn't help closing his eyes and sighing.

Lu Wancheng sent the people off. He picked up the tea cup from off the table and had just taken a sip of when he heard, "Greetings, Shaojun" coming from outside. His hand paused. Pretending not to hear, he went on drinking his tea.

Lin Qingyu walked in and said, "Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng gave a reserved "en". After Lin Qingyu called out to him, he said nothing more, as though he were considering his words.

Lu Wancheng had no intention of compromising so quickly about this matter concerning his dignity as a man. It was embarrassing enough that he wasn't

able to carry this great beauty and now, the great beauty has directly taken away his dignity as a man. How could he possibly tolerate this?

He didn't blame Lin Qingyu. How could he not know that Lin Qingyu did this to save him? But couldn't he have warned him about it in advance? It's scary,

alright? He admitted that he was lazy, but he was still a man, after all. How could he be indifferent to this kind of thing?

Hehe, he's wilted anyway. What was he doing coaxing some great beauty? Great beauties should be left to the male protagonists who go seven times a night to coax. He should just lie down and wait to die.

Lu Wancheng put down the tea cup and said, "If you're here to apologize, you don't have to."

Lin Qingyu said, "You're thinking too much. I'm not here to apologize."

Lu Wancheng: "…" Yes. How very strong.

Lin Qingyu muttured to himself irresolutely, "How about we make a bond as sworn brothers?"

Lu Wancheng was startled. He then laughed out of anger. "You've already castrated me and now I'm going to be sworn brothers with you? You must think I'm cheap."

Lin Qingyu said, restraining his temper, "I didn't castrate you. Your inability was only caused by the drug. A few acupuncture needles and you'll be fine."

Lu Wancheng was a little comforted. However, he still showed a sneer on his face. "No need to change it. I think this prescription is good. I can't use that

anyway so I shouldn't care about it."

"Stop being difficult." Lin Qingyu leaned in close. Voice light and slow, he said, "Didn't you always want us to call each other 'brothers'? "

The word "brother" made Lu Wancheng raise his eyes and look at the beauty standing in front of him, like a plum blossom unyieldingly defying the snow.

If he could get Lin Qingyu to call him "Gege" then selling himself cheap didn't seem so out of the question.

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows. "Are you serious?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "You have my word as a gentleman."

Lu Wancheng covered his lips and coughed. He said, "Then… Let's make another bond."

Neither of them had ever experienced becoming sworn brothers, so Lu Wancheng just did it according to how it was portrayed in the books he read. He asked Huan Tong to prepare an incense burner, a dagger, apricot wine, and

praying mats. He also ordered for a small table to be placed under the eaves. The rest of the things were then symmetrically laid out.

Hua Lu had never seen such a situation before. She asked curiously, “What are Young Master and Shaojun up to?”

Huan Tong was delighted. “Can’t you see? They’re going to be sworn brothers.”

Hua Lu’s eyes widened and she suddenly said in alarm, “Become what?”

“Become sworn brother — ‘With this cup of wine, we brothers go together’. That kind.”

Hua Lu’s big eyes were filled with even greater confusion. “But, they’re already married!”

Lu Wancheng picked up the dagger and said hesitantly. “The book says that when swearing brotherhood, it should be done by taking an oath with your lips smeared with blood……”

Lin Qingyu took on the mentality of someone accompanying their younger brother to play house. He said, ” One’s body, hair and skin are all received from

one's parents. So long as it is done with sincerity, smearing or not smearing one's lips with blood isn't important."

"You're right." Lu Wancheng lit three incense sticks and inserted them into the incense burner, "Let's just swear the oath."

The two clasped the cup of wine in their hands and they both knelt down on the praying mats. Lu Wancheng said ceremoniously, "With the gods of Heaven and Earth as our witness. Today, we, Lu Wancheng and Lin Qingyu, although of different surnames, come together as brothers. We seek not to be born on the same day, in the same month and in the same year, but…" Lu Wancheng paused. He changed his words with a smile, "For the long future ahead, we will share the same boat; even stones will be steamed buns to eat. We will work as

one without heed for riches; even plain boiled water will be taken with gladness."

Lin Qingyu: "……"

The two of them together drank the wine for the ritual and Lin Qingyu called Huan Tong to help Lu Wancheng get up. Seeing Lu Wancheng's smiling, Lin Qingyu said coolly, "Are you happy now?"

The corners of Lu Wancheng's lips ticked up into a smirk. "I just got myself a good brother. Of course, I'm happy. What about you, Qingyu Didi?" After saying so, he looked expectantly at Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "I'm fine, Wancheng Xiong."

Lu Wancheng's smile froze on his face. "No, no, no, I called you 'Qingyu Didi', so you should call me 'Wancheng Gege'. That's only fair."

"'To call each other brothers", if not "Xiong" then what?"

Lu Wancheng suddenly felt like he'd been hit by a bolt from the blue. "…Lin Qingyu, you have no heart."

Lin Qingyu laughed and said, "You've been making such a fuss for so long. Just stop already. Let's go back. You have to drink your medicine. After you drink

it, I'll perform acupuncture for you and bring back your dignity as a man."

It was the middle third of April, the rain finally stopped. The horizon cleared up. There was no cloud in the sky. A warm breeze blew into their sleeves. It

was a good day to travel. Lin Qingyu no longer delayed. He prepared to set out for Changsheng Temple.

Before leaving, he went to see Lu Wancheng. Lu Wancheng had actually already woken up but he still remained lying on the bed, thinking of who knows what. He seemed to be in a good mood and he gave him a lazy greeting.

Lin Qingyu immediately understood and he said with a smile that was yet not a smile, "As they say, 'joy puts heart into a man'. It seems that the acupuncture treatment worked."

Lu Wancheng: "…Eh."

"Perfect timing. Let me have a look."

Lu Wancheng was stricken with panic and he wrapped the quilt tightly around him. "Have a look at what?"

"You're asking what?" Lin Qingyu said lightly, "There's nothing people who've been studying medicine hasn't seen. You don't have to be shy."

Lu Wancheng said quietly, "Qingyu, I find that you're getting worse and worse."

Lin Qingyu's lips curled up. "Didn't Young Master Hou say that he liked it best

when I do bad things?"

Lu Wancheng's eyes darkened and he chuckled softly. "Indeed. If Doctor Lin wants to see it, of course, I have to acquiesce. But I don't feel like moving, so I'll have to trouble you to take a look at it yourself."

Lin Qingyu then joked, "Then, just forget it. There's nothing to see anyway."

Lu Wancheng still wanted to retort but was interrupted by Huan Tong, "Young Master, the carriage is ready."

Lin Qingyu looked out the window. Spring was in full bloom, the sunshine was just right. He asked, "Young Master Hou, would you like to go out to relieve your boredom?"

"Go where?"

"Changsheng Temple."

Lu Wancheng thought for a while. He then smiled and said, "Alright." It just so happened that there was someone he wanted to see.

And so, Lin Qingyu together with Lu Wancheng and Huan Tong rode the carriage to Changsheng Temple in the suburbs of the capital.

Changsheng Temple was the foremost temple in the Empire. Its interior was tranquil and solemn, thoughtful and contemplative. There was an endless

stream of pilgrims. Ordinary people could only burn incense and worship in the front hall. The rear courtyard was reserved for receiving high-ranking officials or members of influential families. It was exactly here that one of Lin Qingyu's sworn enemies, the Dayu's National Teacher, who wrote his Eight Characters for the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, resided and cultivated.

Lin Qingyu has always wanted to ask how the National Teacher calculated his Eight Characters to be beneficial to Lu Wancheng. Was it actually the Will of Heaven of was it done deliberately? Did the National Teacher know that this line of characters he had written almost ruined an innocent person's life?

It was a pity that the National Teacher was in constant closed-door retreat. Apart from the Emperor, it wasn't easy even for the Empress or the Crown

Prince to see him, let alone others; let alone him who was nothing more than the male wife of a Hou's Mansion.

After the monk who greeted them found out their identity, he respectfully said, "It's Young Master Hou and Shaojun. Please come with me. Master Hou's ever-burning altar lamps are in the side hall."

Lin Qingyu said, "It will suffice for just Young Master Hou to see the ever-burning altar lamps. I will stay here in the front hall to burn incense and pray for blessings."

Lu Wancheng said indifferently, "Alright."

Lu Wancheng's illness was temporarily suppressed but when all was said and done, he was still a debilitated person and couldn't be left without someone beside him. Lin Qingyu asked Huan Tong to accompany him.

Lin Qingyu walked to the Buddha statue and asked the monk for three incense sticks. After lighting the incense, he knelt on the prayer mat, closed his eyes, cleared away all thoughts and brought his family to mind.

Then, when he inserted the incense into the burner, he suddenly remembered that farce of becoming sworn brothers from a few days ago. For some reason, he wanted to laugh.

Lu Wancheng seemed to be taking a long time. There were many people coming in and out of the front hall. The monk then asked him to go to the rear

courtyard to wait. Lin Qingyu followed a little monk to the back wing. Compared to the front, there were a lot less people here. A winding path led to quiet seclusion. It was elegant, suitable, quiet and delicate.

Lin Qingyu has always been fond of quiet. At this time, he couldn't help but wish to walk by himself, to calm his mind. He asked the little monk to go on ahead and leave first. He then took an aimless stroll along narrow the path by himself. Unexpectedly, the end of the path actually led a blooming peach grove.

Amidst the fragrance and dappled shadows was a stone table. Two men sat opposite each other with the table between them. One was a handsome young man dressed in crimson, Lu Wancheng. The other was clothed in blue, with a temperament as though he were apart from the world, pure and fresh,

handsome and light-hearted. Lin Qingyu had a feeling that this person should be the Dayu's National Teacher, Xu Junyuan.

Xu Junyuan was admittedly a rarely-seen handsome man, but not only was Lu Wancheng not the least bit inferior, he even somewhat had the upper hand.

Seeing his languid and carefree posture, sitting under the peach blossom tree with flowers falling behind him like rain, he was the very picture of a graceful son of nobility, as clear and bright as a jade tree before the wind.

And he had obviously been like a stranded salted fish in bed just a couple of hours ago.

This person was simply too good at pretending. As long as there were outsiders present, Lu Wancheng always appeared to be the most dazzling one, like a brilliant gem, reflecting all the light.

It was only in front of him that he lost all decency.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help thinking, if only Lu Wancheng usually had even a tenth of his manner now, just how much weight could be taken off his mind?

Xu Junyuan lifted up his sleeve and personally help Lu Wancheng steep a cup of tea. "And what brings Young Master Hou here despite being in poor health?"

Lu Wancheng nodded lightly. He smiled, polite but disaffected, "I have a matter

that I wish to have the National Teacher's wise opinion on."

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "Young Master Hou may as well ask."

Lu Wancheng said slowly, "In this world, is there a resurrection from the dead, or… A transferring of the soul to another body?"

16

Chapter 16

Lin Qingyu's figure was hidden within the peach grove. Around here, there were few people and the conversation between the two came into his ears more clearly.

No wonder Lu Wancheng was willing to come this time. He must have come here for Xu Junyuan. Lu Wancheng has always been the type not to stand if he could sit, not to sit if he could lie down. Since their marriage, Lu Wancheng has only gone out twice — one, was to come here and the other, was to go to the Lin Residence. The things that could get him moving must be things that even salted fish thought was important.

He remembered that Lu Wancheng once showed great interest in stories about supernatural beings. He also mentioned wanting to meet this National Teacher which legend said "had access to the Heavens and knew the ways of ghosts and gods". He never expected he would actually come, let alone manage so easily to meet Xu Junyuan to ask this absurd question.

Resurrection from the dead and soul transfers. If there were such a thing in the world, how could there still be so much ignorance and resentment? Doctor wouldn't need to cure diseases and save people. They would just learn how to

resurrect the dead, wait for the patients to die and then resurrect them. Wouldn't that be simpler and easier?

Xu Junyuan seemed a little surprised. Whether he was surprised at Lu Wancheng's question or at his straightforwardness was uncertain. He pondered for a bit and said, "From ancient times to the present, there have been many people who have pursued immortality and resurrection from the dead. Among them, many are emperors who have made their marks on the annals of history. What the Son of Heaven cannot do with all the power of the world, does not exist. Once the human body is gone, it is gone. It dissipates and passes away, unable to be retrieved by anyone. As for a soul transfer…" Xu Junyuan smiled, "Pray forgive my ignorance but I do not know."

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows, "Turns out there are things even the National Teacher does not know."

"I do not know because I have yet to see it with my own eyes." Xu Junyuan said, "But simply because I have not seen it, does not mean it does not exist."

Lu Wancheng let out an "Oh". Though no longer interested in talking, he still politely said, "As to be expected of the Dayu's only National Teacher. Listening to his Eminence's words is like listening to words."

This was saying that all Xu Junyuan said was insignificant nonsense.

Xu Junyuan kept a cleansing spring breeze-like smile on his face the entire time. "If there has been a case of soul transfer, I would really like to see it.

However, I am afraid the person involved wouldn't speak so readily. Because…"

Lu Wancheng said, "Because he knows no one would believe him. Even if he were to be believed, it would cause a lot of trouble."

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "Young Master Hou is wise."

"Young Master?" Huan Tong emerged from nowhere, pushing along Lu Wancheng's wheelchair. Lu Wancheng must have gotten tired from walking and he was dispatched to get a wheelchair from the carriage.

Following his voice, Lu Wancheng and Xu Junyuan both looked over. Lin Qingyu walked out calmly, "Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng used his hand to prop his forehead. He looked at him with a smile but addressed Xu Junyuan as he said, "National Teacher, this is my wife."

Lin Qingyu was startled. This was the first time he has heard Lu Wancheng address him like that and he felt… very awkward. He didn't know how Lu Wancheng could say it so naturally.

Although he resided in the Hou Mansion and he and Lu Wancheng were nominally husband and wife, neither of them took this "predestined" marriage seriously. Now that his "mother-in-law" who found him so objectionable has

also been confined, he could now, from time to time, forget about this aspect — that he was Lu Wancheng's "wife".

Upon catching sight of Lin Qingyu the smile in Xu Junyuan's eyes grew even more, "Madam Lu."

Lin Qingyu's hands in his sleeves clenched slightly. He said calmly, "Greetings to the National Teacher."

"Madam Lu is blessed with beauty and grace. Young Master Hou is very lucky."

Lu Wancheng also stared at Lin Qingyu, and smiled. "Yes." He openly admired Lin Qingyu as though admiring a most splendid peach blossom in full bloom.

Lu Wancheng's gaze made Lin Qingyu a little wary but he could tell that Lu Wancheng didn't look at him the same way that the lechers did. Lu Wancheng really was just enjoying the scenery.

But Lin Qingyu still threw a knife-sharp look at him — Does this look good?

Lu Wancheng looked away but the corners of his lips still ticked up in a smile, as if to say: I'm not talking nonsense.

"A beautiful scenery and a happily married couple. All we're missing is good wine." Xu Junyuan called in a little monk and said, "Go and fetch the wine I

buried under the peach tree the year before."

Lin Qingyu said, "Young Master Hou is sick. It is not advisable for him to be drinking wine."

"I was negligent." Xu Junyuan raised a cup to the two of them, "Then I will replace the wine with tea and toast the two of you."

Lu Wancheng was about to pick up his tea cup but seeing that Lin Qingyu had absolutely no intention to move, he quickly put his hand back. No ripple appeared on his face, but in his heart, he felt like an absolute f*cking dog.

He knew that Lin Qingyu was unhappy seeing the National Teacher. Later, if Lin Qingyu was unhappy, he wasn't going to be happy either. Oh, how pitiful he was.

Xu Junyuan's smile remained undimmed. "It seems that Madam Lu does not wish to give me this face."

Lin Qingyu said, "March 11th in the year of Guiwei, Chenshi."

Xu Junyuan nodded. "If I remember correctly, this should be Madam Lu's birth date."

"The National Teacher has a good memory." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Like Young Master Hou, I too, have something I am puzzled about for which I wish

to ask the National Teacher for advice."

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "I would be happy to offer advice. I but ask Madam Lu to speak what is on his mind."

Lin Qingyu gently began to speak, "Why me?"

Xu Junyuan seemed to have guessed Lin Qingyu's question and pointed upwards. "Such is the Will of Heaven."

"The Will of Heaven? Huh." Lin Qingyu couldn't hide the ridicule in his words, "When I was young, I wandered everywhere with my mentor. There were often superstitious people who, when sick wouldn't see a doctor or take their medicine. They would rather find some 'sorceress' and purposely make a mystery of simple things. If the illness is cured, then everything was fine; if the illness was not cured, then it was 'the Will of Heaven'. The fate of the patient

has already been fixed and mortals have no way to reverse the rotation of the sky. Is this the 'Will of Heaven' that the National Teacher speaks of."

"Whether this is the Will of Heaven or not, the two of you should know better than I." Xu Junyuan said calmly, "After the Chongxi, did Young Master Hou's condition not improve?"

Lin Qingyu objected. "It's just a coincidence."

Xu Junyuan smiled helplessly. "If Madam Lu thinks so then there is nothing that I can say."

Lu Wancheng thought for a while, and said, "Such being the case, can the National Teacher tell us the process by which you came up with your calculation? Or are the mysteries of Heaven not be revealed?"

Xu Junyuan looked pensive. "Naturally, the mysteries of Heaven are not to be revealed, but it won't hurt to occasionally divulge a bit of it. That day, Young Master Hou was critically ill. Madam and Master Hou entrusted the Empress with asking me for help. I drew up a divination diagram and figured that Young Master Hou was not destined to die yet. If he were able to obtain a precious person, perhaps he would have a slim chance of survival, that's all."

Lu Wancheng smiled. "But now, I have someone precious and yet I am still not long for this world. It can be seen that the Chongxi was of no use. Next time, it

may be best that the National Teacher not point to mandarin ducks so haphazardly, so as not to harm someone's future."

Lin Qingyu heard these words and glanced sideways at the person beside him. Lu Wancheng had said everything he wanted to say.

Xu Junyuan sighed lightly. "Young Master Hou can be so indifferent to life and death. I am ashamed of my inferiority. It is a pity that your fate…" Xu Junyuan paused his words. Turning to Lu Wancheng with different look in his eyes, "Perhaps, Young Master Hou goes by some other name aside from 'Lu Wancheng'? I can use your alternative name to draw up another divination diagram for you."

Lu Wancheng looked directly at Xu Junyuan without batting an eyelid. His eyes were hidden under long eyelashes. After a moment, he replied, "I don't."

Lin Qingyu has heard a little about Lu Wancheng's name. It was chosen by his biological mother who had died prematurely during childbirth. After his birth mother passed, Lu Wancheng was raised by a wet nurse and was later raised by Liang Shi herself. Whether by the wet nurses or by his stepmother, Lu Wancheng was never been given a nickname. If so, then why did Lu Wancheng hesitate before answering this question?

Lin Qingyu remembered the annotations in the "Lin'an Travel Notes". He also remembered some of Lu Wancheng's "nonsense"… When they first got married, Lu Wancheng wasn't even clear on his age. He never took Lu

Wancheng's words to heart, only taking it as him feigning madness and acting like an idiot. Thinking about it now, there were many doubtful things.

Resurrection from the dead, soul transfer…Were there really such things in the world?

How could that be? There must be some other hidden secrets.

Lu Wancheng was hiding something from him.

As the three talked, the sky gradually darkened. A little monk reminded them to go back down early, otherwise the road would be difficult to traverse at night and the trip would be unavoidably bumpy. Xu Junyuan stood up and said, "I wish the two of you a safe trip. I won't be seeing you out."

Lin Qingyu nodded indifferently. Xu Junyuan spoke decently. He was cultured and refined. He didn't not rely on his special status to suppress others. He was just barely able to avoid being regarded as annoying. When he comes to seek revenge on him in the future, he could consider using a less toxic drug.

Before leaving, Lu Wancheng casually broke off a branch of peach blossoms. The carriage was parked at the main gate of Changsheng Temple, quite some distance away from the peach grove. The fragile Young Master Hou no longer had any energy to walk. He sat in the wheelchair and was pushed along by Huan Tong. He heedlessly fiddled with the branch of peach blossoms,

lethargic. Lin Qingyu walked in the front. The two were immersed in their own thoughts and for a while, no words were exchanged.

It was almost dusk by this time, and there were many pilgrims leaving the temple. Huan Tong found that many of the pilgrims walking in front of them would look back. He said unhappily, “Young Master Hou, so many people are looking back at our Young Master.”

Lu Wancheng gave an absent-minded “Oh”.

Huan Tong stared straight ahead. “You don’t care at all?”

He has been following the Young Master since he was a child and he knew that the Young Master disliked it when strangers too blatantly stared. He too didn’t like when passers-by kept sneaking peeks at the Young M

aster. It made him feel uncomfortable.

Lu Wancheng said strangely, “Is thus something to care about? Everyone likes to look at beautiful people.”

Huan Tong mocked, “This married couple who’ve made a bond of brotherhood really is different. Most people would want to hide their wife from the eyes of others. But Young Master Hou is so generous, letting everyone have a look.”

Lu Wancheng smiled. “Let them look if they want. Isn’t my wife’s beauty something I should be proud of? In any case, no matter how much others look,

he won't belong to them and they're left with only being able to see once." Lu Wancheng said a "tsk tsk tsk", sympathetically shaking his head. "How miserable."

Huan Tong murmured quietly, "And you talk like he's yours."

"Uh…" The smile on Lu Wancheng's face gradually disappeared. But he soon turned relieved, "At least I can see him every day. Although, I won't be able to see him for long."

Huan Tong was a little sad. It was true that he wanted to follow the Young Master back to the Lin Mansion as soon as they could, but after getting along these days, he has grown to really like Young Master Hou. If Young Master Hou died, he might shed a few tears.

Huan Tong casually comforted, "It's not yet May. We're still a long way off from winter. Young Master Hou can still look for more than half a year."

"Winter, huh…" Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu's back, his eyes narrowed, "Then I want to see your family's Young Master, red snow cape draped around

his shoulders, standing in the falling snow under an umbrella, his cheeks dyed red and his long hair like ink. Definite eye candy."

Lin Qingyu stopped abruptly and turned around slowly, looking towards Lu Wancheng.

Huan Tong exclaimed in a low voice, "Oops, you were heard by the Young Master!"

The two locked eyes. Lin Qingyu looked at him quietly. Lu Wancheng suddenly had the illusion that what Lin Qingyu was seeing was not this face, but… him.

Lin Qingyu's voice is slightly cold. "Were you being truthful when you said you have no other name?"

Lu Wancheng's heart tightened. He joked in his usual non-serious manner. "This question of yours is funny. If I have one, how come I don't know?"

Lin Qingyu didn't ask much. He said lightly, "I hope you make it to the first snowfall."

17

Chapter 17

Lin Qingyu wasn't planning on getting to the bottom of this with Lu Wancheng. It was inevitable that a person would have secrets that couldn't be told to outsiders. Lu Wancheng didn't want to tell him and he had no necessary reason to know. Just like the venomous thoughts that popped up in his own heart from time to time, these too were things that no one knew.

…Except for Lu Wancheng. Lu Wancheng knew everything. Not only him, Lu Wancheng seemed to see through everyone. He spent entire days acting like salted fish, eating and waiting to die. On the surface, he hadn't a single shred of shrewdness, standing aloof from worldly affairs. Then at certain critical

moments, he would wordlessly work out a solution. It made it hard to pin him down.

But how?

How did Lu Wancheng know everything about him while what he knew about Lu Wancheng was just the tip of the iceberg?

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a long time. Finally, under the pretense of tidying up the library, he asked Hua Lu to help him look for all of Lu Wancheng's calligraphy and writing, rearranging them all again.

He didn't know where this uncalled for unwillingness was coming from either. But since he had doubts, searching for answers was only normal. No one liked the feeling of being kept in the dark.

Hua Lu was a maid sent from Wen Guo Gong's mansion. Madam Wen Guo Gong was concerned about how her grandson was constantly recuperating all the year round. She was afraid he'd feel bored, so she chose a maid with an innocent and artless temperament to send over. Hua Lu was not only dexterous and agile but she was also able to recognize words. She very quickly sorted out the things Lin Qingyu wanted in chronological order.

Lu Wancheng's handwriting could be traced back to the time when he was an ignorant beginner. For the decade following, the changes in his handwriting all had traces that could be followed. By the time Lu Wancheng was fifteen or sixteen, the "shape" and "spirit" of his characters became quite fixed. The

turning point was when Lu Wancheng became critically ill. At that time, Lu Wancheng was unconscious, unable to lift a pen to write. He remained dizzy and muddled for a month, only coming fully awake on their wedding night.

Since then, the "spirit" in Lu Wancheng's written characters changed.

Lin Qingyu picked up a novel that Lu Wancheng had recently read. Leafing through it, he asked, "When did you arrive at the Hou Mansion?"

Hua Lu said, "Replying to Shaojun, I have been in the Hou Mansion for three years."

"What kind of person was Young Master Hou before?"

Hua Lu thought back and said, "Young Master Hou talked a lot less before. He didn't laugh much, and showed no interest in walking the birds or playing touhu." Hua Lu smiled, "After Young Master joined the Mansion, not only did Young Master Hou's body get better but his temperament also became a lot more cheerful. Shaojun is really Young Master Hou's lucky star."

Lin Qingyu refused to comment. "What did he usually do before?"

"Young Master Hou liked to read all kinds of travel notes. His body's not too good, is it? And he's always been trapped in the Mansion so he especially longs to go out. He used to say that if he could just go to LIn'an once, he could die

hap-…" Hua Lu hit her own mouth, "Oh, this mouth of mine. Saying such unlucky things."

That bag of lazy-boned salted fish? Longs to go out?

Lin Qingyu sneered in his heart, and asked, "He must have had a good relationship with the Madam and the Second Young Lady in the past, right?"

"Yes, yes. That's right. The Young Master was very filial to the Madam and he cared a lot for the Second Young Lady. Whenever the Guo Gong Mansion sends anything good, he would always think of them first."

The big change in temperament could be explained by mood changes brought about by his near death experience. Then what about Liang Shi and Lu Niantao? Could someone have visited him in a dream and told him that this pair of mother and daughter weren't good people?

Lin Qingyu was leafing through a detective novel. He had quite the impression of this book's title. This book was once widely circulated among the common

people. When he was studying, his Shixiong and Shidi were all obsessed with it. They ended up neglecting their studies and were scolded by the master.

Lin Qingyu read two random pages. He was starting to become interested and fascinated when he turned to the third page and saw that a person's name was circled. Next to it was a sloppily written note: This person is the murderer.

Lin Qingyu: "……"

It wasn't difficult to see that Lu Wancheng's words were written casually, without deliberately imitating anything. Amidst the laziness was a sense of exquisiteness that couldn't be hidden; very much like the person himself.

"Young Master." Huan Tong's voice interrupted Lin Qingyu's thoughts. "It's time for dinner. Young Master Hou is inviting you to have dinner."

"Okay." Lin Qingyu said, picking up a pen and dipping it in ink, he neatly wrote the words "Get lost!" beside his comment.

May, after the spring rains, was a good season to eat fresh water fish. Today's Ginger Crucian Carp Soup was very well done. The fish was soft and tender, and the fish soup was savory and sweet. Lin Qingyu never has much of an

appetite but even he couldn't helping himself to a bit more. On the contrary, Lu Wancheng didn't even touch it.

Lin Qingyu asked, "You don't like fish?"

"I like it."

"Then how come I haven't seen you eat any?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "There are many too many fish bones in crucian carp. It's too troublesome to eat. Forget it, the other dishes are also very delicious."

Lin Qingyu: "……"

Hua Lu stepped forward and said, "Then I'll help the young master pick out the fish bones."

"No need." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Don't indulge him."

Lu Wancheng covered his lips with his hand and said to Hua Lu, "So fierce. He's so fierce."

Lin Qingyu said coolly, "Do you actually think you're being quiet?"

When the two of them were almost finished eating, a young man announced

from outside, “Young Master, Shaojun, Manager Zhang is here.”

Lin Qingyu put down his chopsticks: “Let him in.”

Zhang Shiquan reported to the two Nan’an Hou Mansion’s income and expenditure for April. He specifically mentioned one master — the Third Young Master of the Hou Mansion, Lu Qiaosong.

Liang Shi had given birth to Lu Qiaosong. He was a through and through legitimate son and heir. He was also the youngest master of the Hou Mansion. But most importantly, he was healthy and everyone in the Mansion knew that the title of Nan’an Hou would fall to him sooner or later.

Lin Qingyu and Lu Qiaosong had met several times around the Mansion but he didn’t know the other very well. He had only heard that Lu Qiaosong was good at songs and poems, and that he was even following the “Wanyue School”. Elegant and unrestrained, he had attracted many of the ladies from the pleasure quarters to secretly pledge their hearts to him. Despite this kind of literary talent, when it came to the imperial examinations, he still behind Sun Shan, causing Nan’an Hou to berate him and forbid him from having any more dealings with the women from the brothels. Outwardly, Lu Qiaosong has been exercising a lot of restraint; as for the actual situation, outsiders wouldn’t be able to tell.

Zhang Shiquan said that Lu Qiaosong’s page had gone to the accounting office to make a fuss yesterday, saying that the accounting office had embezzled their monthly allowance and daily stipend. In the past, Lu Qiaosong’s Qingdai

Pavilion received five hundred taels a month, but now only three hundred taels were given. In the past, Lu Qiaosong had five dishes and one soup, but now there was only four dishes and one soup.

“We have followed the rules of the Hou Mansion for handling all cases of the various courtyards. We have never shortchanged them. I’m afraid that page from the Qingdai Pavilion swearing so means that it is not that we have given less, but they have taken more in the past.”

Lin Qingyu said, “It seems that Lu Qiaosong is afraid that his mother will be released by Nan’an Hou too early.”

Lu Wancheng took a bit of the crucian carp with his chopsticks, slowly picking out all the fish bones. He gave a long drawn out sigh. “Just as I have captured a few monsters, sigh, more demons have descended. Oh why are there so many evils?”

Lin Qingyu frowned. “Eat, don’t speak.”

“……Oh.”

Zhang Shiquan held back a smile and asked Lin Qingyu for instructions, “In my opinion, the Qingdai Pavilion will not let this matter go. Shaojun, what do you think should be done about this matter?”

“Naturally, we will handle matters according to the rules.” Lin Qingyu said, “If they want to make trouble, let them make trouble. The bigger the trouble, the

better. It would be best if they make enough trouble to disturb Nan'an Hou."

Unsurprisingly, a few days later Lu Qiaosong's wet nurse, Qiu Momo, went to the accounting office to make a scene. This time she kicked up quite a big fuss. Qiu Momo lay on the ground, rolling around, crying and wailing, accusing Pan Yiniang and the Shaojun of taking advantage of the Madam's illness to disregard the rules of the household, using their authority for personal gains, treating the legitimate heir harshly. She was even requesting for Master Hou to come out and give them justice.

When Lin Qingyu arrived at the accounting office, Pan Yiniang had also rushed over. She looked at Qiu Momo, who was acting like some mad woman in a public market. She said, at a loss, "Shaojun, this…"

Lin Qingyu walked up to Qiu Momo, and Qiu Momo's wails became even more and more heart rendering. "I have let the Madam down! The Madam is sick and now, the Third Young Master is also sick. A majestic Hou's Mansion does not even provide a doctor for the Third Young Master! You see that Third Young Master is in better health than the Eldest Young Master and you want to drag him down!"

Lin Qingyu asked, "The Third Young Master is sick?"

Zhang Shiquan said, "Yes, Qiu Momo says that their courtyard has no money to pay for a doctor so they are demanding that we send two hundred taels of silver. I told them that we will be calling for a doctor for them, the expenses for

which will be deducted from the general account of the house. Afterwards, she became like that."

Lin Qingyu said, "The Third Young Master is in so such better health than Young Master Hou, how could he suddenly become ill? It must be because the servants have not been serving him well."

Qiu Momo was stunned. Glaring at Lin Qingyu, she said, "Isn't it because the accounting office has docking our allowance! The Third Young Master can't eat well or sleep well. Naturally, he would get sick!"

"As to why the Third Young Master has gotten sick will be known once he's examined. If his allowance is really not enough, adding more is not out of the question. But if it's for some other reason…" Lin Qingyu's eyes swept over Qiu Momo, "then this would be regarded as a different matter. Go, let's head to the Qingdai Pavilion to have a look."

Qiu Momo gritted her teeth and said, "The Third Young Master needs to take a rest because of his illness. The Qingdai Pavilion has no time to receive Shaojun."

Zhang Shiquan smiled and said, "Is it possible that Qiu Momo has forgotten? Our Shaojun is the best doctor."

In the Qingdai Pavilion, Lu Qiaosong was lying on the edge of the bed. He was constantly retching, sweating heavily, getting chills and feeling weak. Lu Niantao was feeding him water and patting his back. Seeing Lin Qingyu and a

large group of people coming in, his expression became even uglier. In consideration for the rules, he had to call out, “Sister-in-law.”

Lu Qiaosong could also be considered a handsome gongzi. Otherwise he wouldn’t have been able to capture the hearts of those women from the pleasure quarters.

Lu Niantao stood up and said, “Why is Sister-in-law here?”

Lin Qingyu said, “I heard that the Third Young Master is unwell, so I especially came to see him.”

Lu Qiaosong, like his father, gave the biggest importance to face. Having him, cutting a sorry figure due to his illness, seen by so many people, he was so angry that he spat out, “Sister-in-law shouldn’t have bothered…”

“No need to be polite, Third Young Master.” Lin Qingyu said, grabbing Lu Qiaosong’s wrist. A quick examination provided him with the general idea. “‘A light touch won’t do, this needs a heavy press. Third Young Master has a deep pulse which is…a sign of kidney weakness.”

When the words fell, Lu Qiaosong abruptly withdrew his hand and yelled, his ears turning red, “What nonsense are you talking about!” He saw everyone

looking at each other; several of the pages even seemed to be holding back laughter. He clutched the quilt tightly. “Get out, get out of here!”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “Third Young Master has been over-indulging, damaging the kidney’s qi. It would be best to practice some moderation.”

Lu Qiaosong locked his eyes onto Lin Qingyu’s face, and said viciously in a low voice, “My sickly eldest brother mustn’t have been able to satisfy you, so you came running here to me to wag your tongue about!”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes darkened and he couldn’t stop the venomous thoughts from frantically rising. What need was there to let a person like this live?

When all was said and done, Lu Niantao was still an unmarried girl, after all. Hearing this, she couldn’t help but shout, “Third brother, stop talking.”

Lu Qiaosong was in the middle of a fit of anger; how could be possibly listen to his sister? His expression twisted and he said, “It wasn’t enough for you to frame my mother. Now, you’re planning to not let even me off!”

“Yes,” Lin Qingyu smiled faintly, “Now, I… Don’t plan on letting you off.”

At this time, a page arrived with a doctor they had called from outside the Mansion. “Let us leave the rest to that doctor.” Lin Qingyu mocked, “Let us

hope that doctor is an expert on andrology."

As Lin Qingyu was exiting the room, he happened to meet the doctor.

The doctor was about Lin Qingyu's age. He had an impressive bearing and was filled with heroic spirit. Rather than a doctor, he was more like a young general coming from the army barracks. When he saw Lin Qingyu, his eyes lit up and he called out excitedly, "Shixiong!"

Lin Qingyu was startled, surprised, "Shidi?"

This person was a junior who studied under the same mentor, Chang Yang. He completed his apprenticeship a year earlier than Chang Yang, afterwards, returning to the capital to prepare for the exam. Chang Yang continued to

travel with their mentor, roaming the land and seeking knowledge. Lin Qingyu had no idea when he had returned to the capital.

Chang Yang said, “I heard that you had married into the Nan’an Hou Mansion. I was wondering whether I was going to run into you today…”

Lin Qingyu could see from out the corner of his eye, Lu Niantao staring at the two of them. He interrupted loudly, “It’s important that you see the patient. Quickly go in. We’ll talk later.”

Chang Yang was a little disappointed. He said with a smile, “I shall listen to my Shixiong.”

Lin Qingyu returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Lu Wancheng had already eaten lunch and was about climb into bed for a nap. He’d heard the news from Hua Lu and while burrowing under the quilt, he said, “I heard that Lu Qiaosong is sick. What’s his illness?”

Lin Qingyu washed his hands. “Aren’t you all-knowing? Have a guess.”

Lu Wancheng didn’t even think about it. “Based on his personality, it’s probably kidney weakness.”

Lin Qingyu: “……”

“Did I get it right? Sigh, these fools simply don’t know how to follow the path of sustainable development. Seven times a night, fighting it out til dawn. Lu

Qiaosong is one and that crown prince is another." Lu Wancheng shook his head in disapproval, "It's because of these kinds of people who have no regard for their bodies and forcibly cause malicious competition, that people who can't go at it seven or eight times a night are seen as having no qualifications to be protagonists."

"Why do you always mention the crown prince? And even know about these secret things." Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes, "Could it be that you and the crown prince…"

"Stop." Lu Wancheng seemed disgusted to the core, "I'm going to throw up."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "That's right, you're not gay."

Lu Wancheng hesitated for a moment. "Yes."

Lin Qingyu didn't want to talk more about these unsavory things. "By the way, I just saw my Shidi in the mansion."

"Shidi?" Lu Wancheng's ears twitched, "A younger brother under the same mentor?"

"En." Lin Qingyu's tone carried a tone of reminiscence, "He and I traveled with our teacher for six years. I haven't seen him for two years now. He… has grown a lot."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Oh, our Doctor Lin's Shidi has grown taller

again. We had better call him Gao Shidi."

Lin Qingyu didn't feel like paying him any attention. He thought for a while, and said, "Speaking of, my Shidi's ancestral home is in Lin'an. You two could be regarded as fellow townsmen."

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows. "So?"

"Once your body's a bit better, would you like to go to Lin'an?"

"I don't want to." Lu Wancheng replied decisively, "Long journeys are tiring. You can't eat well or sleep well on the road. I'll go looking for hardship when I go crazy."

Lin Qingyu's eyes darkened slightly. "Is that so?"

Translator's notes:

Completely unrelated to the story and even BL in general, but any Vtuber fans out there? If there are, I just want to say — Luxiem.

18

Chapter 18

In the Qingdai Pavilion, Chang Yang examined Lu Qiaosong's pulse, and his diagnosis was exactly the same as Lin Qingyu's. However, he wouldn't be so blunt as Lin Qingyu, only saying, "Third Young Master Lu is overworked. In addition, he has drank a lot of alcohol during this period and this caused gastrointestinal discomfort. Fortunately, Third Young Master Lu is young and

healthy. For the next few days, take your medicine on time, eat a light diet, abstain from self-indulgence and you should recover completely in a few days."

Lu Niantao smiled and said, "Doctor Chang has worked hard."

"Then I'll write a prescription."

Lu Niantao nodded, and asked casually, "I heard Doctor Chang call my sister-in-law 'Xiongdi'?"

Chang Yang hesitated for a moment, and said, "What the Second Young Lady said is true. The Shaojun of your honorable house and I studied under the same master. But we have not been in contact for a long time."

Lu Niantao smiled and said, "What a coincidence. It's no wonder that Doctor Chang was so overjoyed when he saw Sister-in-law."

Chang Yang: "……"

Chang Yang wrote out the prescription and made to leave. Lu Niantao said, "Doctor Chang is Sister-in-law's fellow disciple. Why not go to the Blue Wind Pavilion to see Sister-in-law before leaving?"

Chang Yang remembered the "Let's talk later" that Lin Qingyu had said to him just now and decided not to refuse, "Thank you for your kindness, Second

Young Lady."

Lu Niantao ordered someone to take Chang Yang to the Blue Wind Pavilion. She then had someone call another doctor to come and prepared the medicine according that doctor's prescription. After that, she personally stewed a bowl of bird's nest soup and sent it to Nan'anhou, who was still poring over official documents even while he was relaxing in the bath. While Nan'an Hou was feeling relaxed, she talked about Lu Qiaosong being laid up ill in bed. She told him of how her mother had lost all appetite from extreme worry; she had already lost a lot of weight. And how her poor third brother, in feverish unconsciousness, kept calling out to his mother.

Nan'an Hou heard this and couldn't help being moved to compassion. Two months had passed since the incident with Chen Guifei's birthday gift. Liang Shi has been confined behind closed doors, reflecting on her mistakes, made to know her place. But in the end, she was still the official wife of the Hou Mansion, the nominal mother of his three children; he had to leave her a bit of face.

"Your mother has been recuperating for so long, she must surely be better by now." Nan'an Hou said lightly, "But she is still weak so she need not worry about managing the mansion's affairs."

After Liang Shi was set free from her confinement, she immediately rushed to Qingdai Pavilion. Upon learning the true cause of Lu Qiaosong's illness, she was immediately filled with anger. "Have you forgotten how you were admonished by Master Hou after you failed the imperial exams? You still have

the nerve to go looking for a good time at the Jiao Fang Si! What do you think you're doing letting those shady hussies take you in!"

Being pointed at and severely reprimanded by his birth mother like this, the scholar in Lu Qiaosong was shamed into anger. "I never had any serious problem in the first place. It was that Lin Qingyu who added oil and said in front of the servants that I…A scholar would rather accept death than humiliation. I swear that this hatred will be avenged or I shall be too shamed to face life!"

"Don't talk about it anymore." Lu Niantao said calmly, "Mother has been released from her confinement. This is a good thing."

"Of what use is being released?" Liang sighed, "Now, your father doesn't trust me. Your maternal grandparent's family is of no use. After last time, your father has never been in my room again. He probably spends all his time at Sleeping Moon Pavilion."

Lu Niantao said helplessly, "Mother, how many times have I told you? A childless concubine poses no threat to you. It's Sister-in-law… Now the Mansion's little matters are handled by Pan Shi, but the major matters are in

the hands of Sister-in-law. Mother. If you want to regain the right of stewardship, your focus should be on Sister-in-law."

Lu Qiaosong said, full of resentment, "I don't understand, Lin Qingyu is a Chongxi male wife. His father is just nothing but a fifth rank Pan Guan of the Imperial Hospital. How could he have played you all like this?"

Lu Niantao glanced at Liang Shi and said, "I want to ask that too. Mother, why didn't you tell me in advance what you were doing with Liu Momo?"

Liang Shi knew that her daughter was extremely intelligent, and in front of her, she couldn't help being completely subservient. "I-I, of course, I was afraid to worry you."

"If you'd told me in advance, I definitely would have stopped it. I asked Doctor Zhang and he said that Eldest Brother will not make it through to next year. Then, we simply have to wait. Why are you in such a hurry? And now, you can't even exercise any control over the household. You've also lost Father's trust. Even once Eldest Brother is gone, Pan Shi and his Sister-in-law will still be here, how can shut out the sky with one hand?"

Looking back on it, Liang Shi too thought that Liu Momo had egged her into having her heart covered with lard. Lu Qiaosong said, "What's done is done. What's the use of you telling off Mother now? Better put all that effort into

thinking about how to get back the power of stewardship. I only got three hundred taels this month. How could that possibly be enough?"

Lu Niantao thought for a while, and said, "I may have a way. Maybe I can give it a try."

Liang Shi hurriedly said, "What way?"

Lu Niantao said slowly, "Continue to let that Doctor Chang look after Third Brother's illness."

In the bedroom of Blue Wind Pavilion, Lin Qingyu held a pen in his hand, writing out a prescription. Lu Wancheng, who was almost asleep, opened his eyes, wanting to see more of the beauty before going to sleep.

"What are you writing?"

"Prescription."

Lu Wancheng stared blankly. "Eh? Are you going to give me a new medicine again? What kind of medicine is it this time?"

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes. "A medicine to liven things up."

Lu Wancheng:?

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Your Third Brother said that because you can't satisfy

me, I slandered him by saying he has kidney weakness."

Lu Wancheng:? ? ?

At this time, Hua Lu came in to deliver a message, interrupting Lu Wancheng's 'question mark'. She said that a Doctor Chang was asking to see Shaojun and was waiting in the courtyard.

"It's my Shidi," Lin Qingyu said, "I'll go see him. You can take a nap."

Lu Wancheng said softly and slowly, "Oh, all right."

He closed his eyes again but somehow, he was no longer the slightest bit sleepy. Hua Lu walked softly and quietly to the bedside, thinking of tucking in the quilt for him. Suddenly, she heard his call out, "Hua Lu."

Hua Lu jumped from fright. "Young Master? You're not asleep yet." Usually at this hour, in Shaojun's words, Young Master should be dead asleep.

Lu Wancheng sat up, hugged the pillow and asked, "When did you change the pillows to green? It makes me look like I've got something green on top of my

head."

"What color would the Young Master like? I'll change it for you."

Lu Wancheng looked out the window, seeming thoughtful. "I'll think about it."

Lin Qingyu received Chang Yang in the main hall. Among their master's apprentices, Lin Qingyu and Chang Yang were accepted in the same year, and their relationship was a bit closer than with the other apprentices. Seeing each other after two years, Lin Qingyu inevitably felt a little rueful looking at this young man before him who was now obviously taller and darker-skinned, thinking about how different his own situation was today.

"Shidi has grown taller…" Lin Qingyu paused. He remembered someone's way of calling him "Gao Shidi". Suddenly, he couldn't speak anymore; he even wanted to laugh a little.

Lu Wancheng hardly ever did anything proper, but his brainwashing skills were topnotch.

Chang Yang wasn't aware that Lin Qingyu's attention on him was already dragged away by something else. He looked at Lin Qingyu deeply, his chest was full of agitated emotions.

He was still the Shixiong in his memory, steadfast and imposing, his voice is slightly cold; he was obviously a man, but his face can be described as " beautiful but cold". It was a pity that though the person hasn't changed, the

circumstances have. In just two short years, his cherished Shixiong has become the wife of the invalid Young Master Hou. How could one possibly accept it?

If he had known that his Shixiong would someday marry a man and be someone's wife, he would have done it a long time ago. For what reason had he been enduring all these years?

Compared to him, Lin Qingyu seemed to be much calmer, "When did Shidi arrive at the capital?"

All sorts of feelings were welling up in Chang Yang's heart. He said, "At the end of last year, I bid farewell to Master and returned to Lin'an to accompany my parents to rush to the capital after the New Year. I first went to the Lin Residence to look for you, but your father told me that you've already… "

Lin Qingyu asked, "The Master, how is he?"

"Master is still strong and vigorous despite his age. It's just, Shixiong, you…" Chang Yang lowered his voice, his eyes couldn't hide his emotions. "Shixiong, I know you were forced into this. An imperial decree left you with no choice but to surrender to a marriage."

Having been reunited after such a long time, Lin Qingyu didn't want to talk about this with his junior. "Stop talking."

Chang Yang turned a deaf ear to him and said, "No one knows Shixiong better than I do. I know Shixiong's ambitions well. Seeing Shixiong having fallen to

this point, I haven't closed my eyes for days and nights."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "Shidi."

"I have already figured out a way. I want to take you out of the Hou Mansion. We can be the same as we were in the past, traveling together to all corners of the world…"

Lin Qingyu was about to interrupt, when a male voice cut in, "What are you talking about? Could you let me in on this as well? I want to hear too."

The two turned towards the sound. They saw Lu Wancheng, immaculately dressed, with the elegance and refinement befitting a noble. "Qingyu, won't you introduce me?"

Lin Qingyu found it a little strange. What was Lu Wancheng doing up at this hour? "Shidi, this is Young Master Hou; Young Master Hou, this is my junior brother."

A simple and clear introduction, not a single word more than necessary.

Chang Yang cupped his hands in obeisance and said, "Greetings to Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng was immediately friendly and he said with a smile, "Hello, Shidi."

A different expression flashed in Chang Yang's eyes. He smiled, "I pray that

Young Master Hou not misunderstand." He looked at Lin Qingyu's side profile. "Shixiong and I grew up together. We share a brotherly love for each other; our relationship is deeper than ordinary people's. It has been a long time since we've seen each other and we lost track of time talking. I hope we didn't disturb Young Master Hou?"

Brotherly love? Heh, you think Laozi hasn't read enough novels to know that being a Shixiong is a high-risk occupation?

We're all thousand year old foxes here, no need to act all mysterious.

Lu Wancheng kept the smile on his face. "Misunderstand? What is there for me to misunderstand? I pray the Shidi not misunderstand that I might misunderstand."

Now that Lu Wancheng was here, Chang Yang naturally could not continue their conversation just now. He said, "By the way, Shixiong, while visiting the South China Sea, Master discovered a medicine that has a miraculous effect on tuberculosis."

Lin Qingyu's face was relaxed. "Tell me about it."

Now that they were talking about medicine, Lu Wancheng had no chance to interrupt. He didn't care. In any case, he remained seated as hosts with Lin

Qingyu, holding his cup of tea and savoring its taste. It was in situations such as these that one must appear ever tolerant.

After the two had finished talking, Lu Wancheng warmly invited Chang Yang to stay for dinner. Chang Yang saw that his presence hadn't affected Lu Wancheng in the slightest and instead, it was he himself who became overcautious and annoyed. No matter how reluctant he was to part with his Shixiong, he still declined Lu Wancheng's repeated invitations to stay. It was a

pity that he had yet to explain his plan to his Shixiong. However, he mustn't rush this matter. He will continue to look for other opportunities.

Before leaving, Chang Yang mentioned that Lu Qiaosong's condition was indeed due to kidney weakness and that he had prescribed the appropriate medicine.

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "Lu Niantao already knows about our relationship as fellow disciples. I'm afraid Shidi wrote that prescription for nothing."

After Chang Yang left, the 'noble son' aura on Lu Wancheng's body disappeared without a trace. He yawned and said, "I'm so sleepy. I'm going to catch up on sleep."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What were you up to coming here and spouting a bunch of nonsense instead of taking an afternoon nap?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Wasn't it to provide warm hospitality to your shidi?"

Lin Qingyu couldn't understand the reason for it. "Why?"

Lu Wancheng smiled like a scoundrel. "Ah, but this is the magnanimity of the empress, Qingyu. Wouldn't you say that this completely different from the wildflowers outside?"

Lin Qingyu said, "…Not really."

19

Chapter 19

Chang Yang became a frequent visitor of Nan'an Hou Mansion. Every three days, he would go to Qingdai Pavilion to examine Lu Qiaosong's pulse. Afterwards, he would go to the Blue Wind Pavilion to stay for a bit, occasionally bringing some small gifts for Lin Qingyu.

It was a joy to be able to see his Shixiong so often. It was just that every time they met, Shixiong would have Young Master Hou beside him. Young Master Hou looked as though he had really hit it off with him; looking more thrilled to see him that his Shixiong was, as though he were his Shixiong. To say nothing of telling Lin Qingyu his plan, he couldn't even get the opportunity to speak with Lin Qingyu alone.

On this day, before Chang Yang came to the Nan'an Hou Mansion, he first went to the most popular pastry shop in the capital, queued up for half an hour and bought two boxes of plum cakes that his Shixiong loved. He had just stepped through the door of the Blue Wind Pavilion, food box in hand, when he heard the clucking of chickens mixed with Lu Wancheng's hearty laughter. "Little Shidi is here again. You could just bring yourself, there's no need to bring gifts. Come in, come in."

Before Chang Yang could see the scene in the courtyard clearly, a figure covered in a riot of color flew in front of his face. When he came back to his senses, a feather floated down from the air and landed on his head. With the

chicken feather in his hair, he was the spitting image of the filial son by the roadside, selling himself as a slave to bury his father.

Chang Yang once again froze. “Young Master Hou, this is…”

There was a smile at the corner of Lu Wancheng’s lips. “Cockfighting.”

It was only then that Chang Yang saw clearly that what had flown past his eyes just now was a rooster that had lost a half its feathers, looking ragged and exhausted. That flight should have been its last stubborn struggle. After that flight, it fell to the ground, gasping its final breaths. And the other rooster, the culprit, stood proudly at Lu Wancheng’s feet, confidently shaking its little rooster head.

Looking at the chicken feathers littering the ground, Chang Yang couldn’t help but feel distressed. Heaven has no eyes; how could they allow his Shixiong, this

immortal like existence, to marry this spoiled fop whose actions were a disgrace to his good looks?

Lu Wancheng's excessive impropriety strengthened his determination to rescue his Shixiong from this abject misery. "Greetings to Young Master Hou. Where is my Shixiong?"

"He found me too noisy, so he went out to relax. He should be back any time now." Lu Wancheng looked at the door and smiled, "Oh? Speak of Cao Cao and he will be here."

Lin Qingyu had taken Huan Tong to the garden to bury a few pots of medicinal materials under a tree. When he came back to see the lively scene at the Blue Wind Pavilion, a vein on his forehead twitched.

He blamed the medicine he formulated for Lu Wancheng for being too effective. With the weather becoming warmer every day, it gave Lu Wancheng

the energy to “seek out a life of dissipation” at home, throwing the entire Blue Wind Pavilion into turmoil, with chickens flying and dogs jumping.

Lu Wancheng welcomed Lin Qingyu. Meeting his icy gaze, he said with a smile, “Qingyu came back at just the right time. Your little Shidi is here.”

Chang Yang: “…Shixiong.”

Lin Qingyu looked up at Chang Yang’s head. “What are you doing with that chicken feather in your hair?”

Lu Wancheng turned his face away and gave an impolite “Pft.”

Chang Yang was extremely embarrassed. He quickly took off the chicken feather from his head and said, shamefaced, “Shixiong, I bought you two boxes of plum cakes. Try them later.”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Thank you very much.”

“Qingyu, you’re late.” Lu Wancheng leaned over and picked up the cock that had won many victories for him. “You didn’t get to appreciate my great Baobei’s heroic posture in combat.”

“And I have no wish to appreciate it.” Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “If you have had enough fun, ask someone to clean up the yard. This mess is unbearable and you’re not even embarrassed to let outsiders see it.” Lin Qingyu caught sight of the rooster in Lu Wancheng’s arms from out the corner

of his eye. The topic of conversation changed again, “Only… this chicken looks a bit familiar.”

Lu Wancheng: “Huh? You recognize it?”

“It seems like I do.” Lin Qingyu thought for a while, “It looks like the rooster that took your place when we got married.”

Lu Wancheng said in surprise, “You remember even this?”

“I have a highly retentive memory.”

“…” Lu Wancheng looked down at the rooster in his arms, his expression looked quite complicated. Chang Yang also turned to look. In his eyes was something like…envy?

Lu Wancheng handed the rooster to Huan Tong and instructed, “Go and find out if this one is the rooster that worshipped with Qingyu.”

As Chang Yang had expected, today, the three of them were gathered together once again and he couldn’t find the opportunity to speak with Lin Qingyu alone. For Lin Qingyu, he was a male outsider, and it was inconvenient to stay for a long time. After exchanging a few words, he must take his leave.

Time was running out, he couldn’t talk about his plan with his Shixiong, so he settled for the next best thing and told interesting anecdotes of their travels with their Master — such as when they went boating on the Jiangnan

waterways; traveled across the Shu countryside, sampling genuine peasant fare. One winter, they were forced to spend the night in a ruined temple because they did a last minute rescue of an injured hunter which delayed their journey. In the dead of winter, with the wind bitingly cold, they, their Master, another fellow senior disciple and an accompanying page huddled around the fire, closing in for warmth. Their Master feeling so sorry for them, took off his coat to cover them.

Chang Yang observed Lu Wancheng's expression as he said all this. But no matter what he said, Lu Wancheng always looked very interested. He asked, urging him on, "Then what happened?"

"For real?!"

"Ah, people."

"Sigh, this is life."

……

Lin Qingyu couldn't stand it anymore and interrupted Chang Yang, "How is Lu Qiaosong's condition?"

Chang Yang said, "Third Young Master Lu's illness is almost healed. But the Second Young Lady wishes for him to be brought back to full health. So, she

has me come to the mansion every three days just as before, to examine the Third Young Master Lu's pulse. "

Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng looked at each other, sharing a tacit understanding. He then said, "It's getting late. Shidi should head back."

Chang Yang was quite unwilling. "Then, I'll come see Shixiong another day."

After Chang Yang left, Lin Qingyu said, "Lu Niantao knows about my relationship with Chang Yang and she still asks him to diagnose and treat Lu Qiaosong. There must be a trick."

Lu Wancheng opened the food box Chang Yang had given. "She probably wants to use your Shidi to do something."

Lin Qingyu thought about possible actions Lu Niantao might take. He saw a certain someone, minding his own business, steeping tea. He couldn't help narrowing his eyes and said, "You certainly enjoy eating the cakes my Shidi gives me."

"Don't be so stingy, Qingyu." Lu Wancheng took a small bite of the plum cake, pairing it with tea. A smile appeared at the corners of his lips. "Before, the

treats all those men and women gave me, I shared with my brothers. A good Xiongdi shares his blessings."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What do you mean 'all those men and women'?"

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows. "Why? You're allowed to have schoolmates but I'm not?"

Lin Qingyu said bluntly, "You've been raised in the inner courtyard since you were a child. Reading and writing, they were all taught to you by private teachers. Where would you have had classmates? And even if you had, where would you have gotten female ones?"

Lu Wancheng held back his smile. He was silent for a while and then, said slowly, "Doctor Lin seems to have a lot of questions to ask me."

"I didn't ask anything." Lin Qingyu said calmly, "And I also didn't ask Young Master Hou to tell me anything."

Lu Wancheng propped his cheek in his hand. It was difficult to tell by his tone whether what he was saying was true or not. "You can ask. Maybe I'll answer you truthfully."

Lin Qingyu paused. He said, "Forget it, I'm not interested."

Rather than him clucking his tongue, pressing him for an answer, he hoped that Lu Wancheng would tell him of his own accord. Otherwise, even if he

asked, Lu Wancheng might not tell the truth.

Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu for a while, then changed the topic with a smile, “Qingyu, shall we have dinner together tonight? I asked the kitchen to stew the rooster.”

Lin Qingyu followed his lead and asked casually, “Which one?”

“The one that performed the marriage ceremony with you.”

Lin Qingyu was baffled. “What did it do to offend you?”

Lu Wancheng winked. “Looking at it puts me in a bad mood.”

Lin Qingyu sneered. “You kill the donkey as soon as it leaves the millstone. If you’re so capable, back then, why didn’t you get up and perform the marriage ceremony with me yourself?”

Lu Wancheng: “… You’re blaming me?”

Three days later, Chang Yang came to the Nan’an Hou Mansion as usual to examine Lu Qiaosong’s pulse. Lu Qiaosong was extremely impatient; not only did he keep urging the doctor to hurry the entire time but when his

examination was finished, he immediately left without even asking for the result.

Lu Niantao said apologetically, “Third Brother must have something urgent he needs to attend to. Doctor Chang, please forgive his rudeness.”

Chang Yang said, “Second Young Lady is being too polite. There is no longer any great obstruction in the Third Young Master’s body. He can already resume his normal work and rest.”

Lu Niantao smiled and nodded. “Thank you for your hard work. Since that is the case, we will no longer need to inconvenience Doctor Chang going to come her every three days.”

Chang Yang was stunned, and said, feeling a sense of loss, “Then, I shall be taking my leave.”

After Chang Yang left, Lu Niantao summoned her trusted maid and instructed her, “Follow Doctor Chang and make sure that you’re not discovered. If he does anything out of the usual, report back immediately.”

Gaining entry into the compound of a wealthy family such as Nana’an Hou was not an easy matter. Chang Yang was well aware that today might be his last chance. If he misses it, he didn’t know how long he would have to wait. Chang Yang considered it over and over and then, made up his mind. He wrote a note with the pen and paper he carried with him. Just as he was worrying how he was going to get the note to Ling Qingyu, he saw Huan Tong coming

from the direction of the garden with two medicine jars in his arms. Without any hesitation, he blocked his path.

Lin Qingyu had brought Huan Tong with him during his travels, so Huan Tong and Chang Yang were quite familiar with each other. Huan Tong accepted Chang Yang's note and said, "Don't worry, Chang Gongzi, I will definitely deliver this."

Chang Yang warned, "Don't let anyone else know about this, especially Young Master Hou."

Huan Tong hesitated but agreed, "This… alright."

When Huan Tong returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng were playing chess against each other by the window. Lu Wancheng had already lost seven games in a row and was being regarded with disdain by Lin Qingyu, saying that the chickens were better than him. Lu Wancheng

pressed down a chess piece and said, “I learned only a little bit when I was a kid. Being able to play like this is already pretty good, ok?”

Lin Qingyu sneered, “How very humble of you.”

The two of them won’t be done for quite some time and Chang Yang seemed to be in a rush. Huan Tong leaned close to Lin Qingyu’s ear and whispered quietly, “Master, I have something to tell you.”

Lin Qingyu frowned and moved away. “If you have something to say, then just say it directly.”

Huan Tong glanced at Lu Wancheng and said, feeling awkward, “But…”

“Say it.” He and Lu Wancheng were already tied to the same boat. There was nothing about the Nan’an Hou Mansion that couldn’t be said in front of Lu Wancheng.

Since the Young Master said so, Huan Tong said aloud, “Chang Gongzi asked me to give something to the Young Master and he said that Young Master Hou must not find out about it!”

Lin Qingyu: “……”

Lu Wancheng threw the chess piece on the board, and said slowly, “Okay, now,

I'm a little angry."

Putting up an act in front of him, he could still regard as watching some sort of show. But getting up to petty tricks in private and paying no regard to martial ethics was crossing the line.

Lin Qingyu asked, "What is it?"

Huan Tong took out the note and Lin Qingyu opened it in front of Lu Wancheng. Only six words were written on it: Meet me in the back garden.

" The willow sways beneath the moon, and lovers meet at nightfall." Lu Wancheng recited this line of poem, deliberately enigmatic. "Will Doctor Lin be accepting his Shidi's invitation? How very curious, I'm looking forward to it."

Lin Qingyu had a good guess as to the purpose behind Chang Yang's private meeting with him. It was still probably about taking him out of the Hou Mansion. He muttered, "Shidi's every word and deed within the mansion must

be within the control of Lu Niantao and the others. I think I already know Lu Niantao's intentions."

"You only found out now?" Lu Wancheng laughed, "Everyone can see your Shidi's blind affections towards you. You can't blame them for trying to use it to make trouble."

Lin Qingyu was displeased. "Can you not speak properly?"

Lu Wancheng raised his voice. "I can't. Someone's about to f*cking undermine my foundation and you think I can still speak properly?"

"Didn't we make a bond as sworn brothers? Aren't we good brothers partaking food together? What 'undermining foundation' are you talking about?"

Lu Wancheng was left speechless by his retort. After he calmed down, he suddenly realized that what Lin Qingyu said made sense. How could a good brother possibly put a green hat on you?

As long as he treated his wife as a brother, a green hat would never grace his head.

Lu Wancheng lay back on the chair and said lazily, "You're right. Forget I said anything."

Lin Qingyu gave a sarcastic smile and said to Huan Tong, "Go and reply to

Chang Yang. Have him leave the Hou Mansion. He mustn't come back again."

"Wait." Lu Wancheng's eyes were dark, as though some evil tricks were brewing within. He saw him raise the corner of his lips into a wicked smile. He said, "My good brother, I think you should still go and meet with your Shidi."

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. " What's your idea? "

20

Chapter 19.2

Not long after, Huan Tong and Hua Lu left the Blue Wind Pavilion one after the other; one went to the long-waiting Chang Yang, and the other went to Sleeping Moon Pavilion where Pan Yiniang was.

Huan Tong found Chang Yang and told him that the Young Master had read his letter. There were so many people in the mansion during the daytime that it was inconvenient to meet with him. He was going to have to be inconvenienced to wait a couple of hours in the mansion and come nightfall, the two of them would meet.

Chang Yang had no objection. Huan Tong took him to an empty room in a side courtyard of the mansion. He said, “Chang Gongzi, please wait here. When the time is right, the Young Master will come without prompting.”

This wait lasted from dusk until dark. During this period, Huan Tong even served him a meal.

It wasn’t long past the summer solstice, the days were getting hotter day by day. Come nightfall, the lingering summer heat gradually dissipates, even becoming slightly cool sometimes. At this moment, if one had a beautiful woman by his side to take a stroll through the garden to appreciate the lotus

under the moonlight and listen to the sound of cries of the frogs, then it would certainly be worthy of this fine moment and beautiful scene.

It was a pity that the two “beautiful women” of the Blue Wind Pavilion were doomed to be left without this leisurely enjoyment tonight.

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng out of the Blue Wind Pavilion then handed the wheelchair to Hua Lu. “I’m going.”

Lu Wancheng nodded. “Go on.”

Lu Wancheng watched as Lin Qingyu left, looking at his cold and distinct back. He felt a little uncomfortable. He attributed this discomfort to a man’s desire to monopolize rearing its ugly head. It should be fine as long as he exercises a bit of control. It was like when he was little and someone would borrow and walk away with his most favorite beautiful toy. He would be

concerned about it the entire time, for fear that the toy would be soiled by others.

…Wait, this brainless little Shidi wouldn't be so impulsive as to enact a passionate confession, and then stage a scene where he traps Lin Qingyu against a corner, puts his arms are the other's waist and forces a kiss, right?

F*ck.

Lu Wancheng's thoughts were running wild. He then heard Hua Lu ask him, "Young Master, where are we going now?"

Matters were urgent. Lu Wancheng calmed his mind and said, "The back garden."

Lin Qingyu took advantage of the moonlight and passed through the back garden to the room where Chang Yang was waiting. With three taps on the door, the door opened from the inside.

Chang Yang couldn't hide his excitement: "Shixiong!"

Lin Qingyu said, voice low, "If you've got something to say, let's talk about it inside."

Inside, the only source of illumination was an oil lamp used by the servants; it could only illuminate a small area around them. Chang Yang stared fixedly at

the person before him. Under the faint light, the flame flickered in his Shixiong's eyes. Staring at it for a long time, his breathing grew scalding.

Before he could have his fill of looking, Lin Qingyu went straight to the point. "Talk."

Chang Yang looked at his slightly parted red lips. After being momentarily dazed, he said all in one go, "Shixiong, come with me!"

Sure enough.

Lin Qingyu sighed lightly and asked calmly, "And where would you taking me?"

"Anywhere! Away from the Hou Mansion, away from the capital!" Chang Yang's eyes flashed with longing, "We can go back to the Master. We'll go live in the mountains and forests in seclusion with him, okay?"

Lin Qingyu pressed the space between his brows and said, "My marriage with Lu Wancheng was bestowed by the Emperor. Once I'm gone, what would happen to the Lin Residence?"

"I have considered this matter too." Chang Yang said, "Shixiong, do you remember that Master has been trying to create a medicine that can fake death?"

Lin Qingyu's interest was finally piqued. When he had traveled with his

Master, they had a chance encounter with a young woman who had hung herself on a branch. After saving the woman, the young woman wept as she told them of her experience. She had been sold as a concubine to the local bigshot by her gambler of a father. Everyday, she was beaten and insulted; she was even threatened that should she run away, he would take away the lives of her family as recompense. The young woman was left with no choice but to seek death.

From then on, the Master had the idea to create some sort of medicine that could fake death.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Master succeeded?”

Chang Yang nodded again and again. “Yes, Master named it the Wangsheng Pill. He also passed the prescription to me. Unfortunately, my skills are not

good and even with a prescription, I can't make it. But I know Shixiong surely can."

"So, you want me to fake my death to escape?"

"Yes, as long as the world thinks that Shixiong is dead, they definitely won't trouble the Lin Residence."

"It's a good idea." Lin Qingyu said lightly, "But what's the point of being a dead person?"

Chang Yang said without hesitation, "As long as Shixiong regains his freedom, he can go do whatever he wants. Isn't that enough?"

"What I want to do… heh." Lin Qingyu smiled, as if mocking Chang Yang's naivety. "Didn't you say you that you understand me? How can you not even know what I really want? I don't want to be an ordinary doctor. I want to be the best. I have to read all the books in the world and have an inexhaustible supply of rare medicinal materials. And these, only the Imperial Medical Department can give me. I don't shun prosperity, wealth, and power. I also like to see people kneeling before me, trembling with fear. Do you understand?"

Chang Yang looked blankly at Lin Qingyu, as though he were looking at a stranger.

"You don't know anything and yet you keep harping on about taking me away. It's ridiculous." Lin Qingyu stood up, "I'll have Huan Tong escort you out of the

Mansion."

Things were much too far from Chang Yang's expectations. In his eyes, his Shixiong was a noble and benevolent gentleman who harbored virtue and merit. Associating him with wealth and power was simply too outrageous, too unfitting. For a while, he truly couldn't accept it. However, seeing that his Shixiong was about to push the door to leave, he couldn't help blurting out his thoughts, "Then, what Shixiong wants, can Young Master Hou give to you?"

Lin Qingyu stopped in his tracks.

"Young Master Hou is not long of this world. Now, he's simply muddling along, eating and waiting to die. How is he any different from a spoiled fop thumbing his nose at the world? How can someone with such shameful behavior…"

Lin Qingyu interrupted him, voice cold, "Then what do you want him to do?"

Chang Yang was stunned. "…Shixiong?"

"Even you know that Lu Wancheng is terminally ill, he's only got a single breath in him. You see him talking and laughing with you, taking nothing seriously. But you know how many medicines he takes every day, how many acupuncture treatments. He takes two steps and he's out of breath. A little cold can put him into a coma, one he might not wake up from. When he gets a cough, he can't sleep well all night but because he's worried he might wake me up, he'll force himself to endure it. He's like this already, what do you want him

to do? Go and take the imperial examinations? Or join the army and serve the country? He only has half a year left, why can't he spend what little time he has being a spoiled fop who doesn't have to worry about anything?"

Lin Qingyu rarely spoke so much to others. How could he not know that Lu Wancheng was mischievous, lazy and weird? He couldn't understand how Lu Wancheng couldn't take anything seriously, how he couldn't care about

anything. He even mocked Lu Wancheng to his face many times before. But this didn't mean that others could look down on Lu Wancheng.

After a long silence, Chang Yang asked in a low voice, "Shixiong, do you…like him?"

Lin Qingyu didn't hesitate. "I'm not gay and neither is he. My relationship with him, if I have to say…" Lin Qingyu smiled softly, "We are probably bosom friends forcibly tied by a predestined marriage."

"Not gay." Chang Yang smiled wryly, "I see, it's me…who has bothered Shixiong."

Lin Qingyu wanted to say that he wasn't enough to be a bother to him, but seeing Chang Yang's desolate expression, he decided to hold the words back.

Chang Yang took a deep breath and took out a prescription from the medicine box. He forced out a smile. "This is the formula for the Wangsheng pill. Please accept it, Shixiong. I-…I'm leaving."

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. "Huan Tong, see the guest out."

Chang Yang walked out of the room. Looking up at the bright moon on the horizon, he suddenly sighed. He traveled all the way to the capital for his

Shixiong. But now, the person before him was no longer the one in his heart. Maybe he should leave.

No, Shixiong has never been like what he had imagined. It was his own wishful thinking forcing his ideas onto his Shixiong. Shixiong was right; him being like this was ridiculous.

Chang Yang was feeling dejected when he heard Huan Tong say, “Don’t be sad, Chang Gongzi. With how my family’s Young Master is, he will definitely not let himself be trapped in this wretched Nan’an Hou Mansion.”

Chang Yang laughed at himself. “It was just me thinking myself infallible.”

Huan Tong patted Chang Yang on the shoulder and said, “Let’s go, Chang Gongzi, or it will be too late.”

Chang Yang asked, “Too late for what?”

Huan Tong smiled and said, “Young Master Hou knew that Chang Gongzi might be sad tonight, so he’s specially inviting you to watch a good show.”

The night grew darker, a dark cloud silently obscured the moonlight, and the lights in the mansion were extinguished. In the wooded back garden, if it

weren't for the lit lanterns, it would be difficult to see even the path under one's feet.

Lu Qiaosong took Qiu Momo and hid behind a tree, staring at two figures by the pool. He asked, "Are you sure it's them?"

Qiu Momo said, "I can't be mistaken. Doctor Chang was wearing clothes of this color today and the Shaojun wore white clothes."

Lu Qiaosong gritted his teeth and said, "Go! Don't let them get away!"

Qiu Momo immediately jumped out from behind the tree. She can't do much of anything but her voice was loud. Her howl could be heard by half the mansion. "Oh, if it isn't Shaojun? It's already so late but Shaojun isn't attending to the Young Master by his sickbed, instead, he's sneakily admiring the moon with someone!"

This howl came from out of the blue and the man in white was startled. He was unsteady on his feet and almost fell into the water. Fortunately, the blue clothed man beside him immediately caught him and steadied him on his feet.

The man in blue shouted sharply, "Who said such nonsense!"

Qiu Momo's knees instantly went weak when she heard this voice.

How could it be Master Hou's voice? Qiu Momo staggered and wanted to run back but she was suddenly stopped by Hua Lu coming out from nowhere. Hua

Lu said loudly, “Why is Qiu Momo in such a rush?” She turned to look behind the tree, “Ei? Third Young Master is also here. Eldest Young Master is admiring the moon with the Master. Didn’t you see?”

Lu Qiaosong was forced to abort his escape and he cursed secretly in his heart.

Hua Lu’s voice was not as penetrating as Qiu Momo’s, but it was enough for Nan’an Hou to hear. Today, he was resting in Sleeping Moon Pavilion as per usual, Pan Shi attending upon him to change into normal clothes when, seeing the bright moonlight outside, Pan Shi said that the lotus flowers in the pond were blooming profusely and asked him if he wanted to take a walk by the pond to enjoy the moon.

Nan’an Hou was also a scholar, and couldn’t bear to betray the beauty of the moonlight. And so, he took Pan Shi to the back garden where he happened to meet his eldest son who was also here to enjoy the moon. Father and son got a rare opportunity to chat and Pan Shi, under the guise of preparing their food, thoughtfully left this time for father and son.

Lu Wancheng took the initiative to mention the Empress. The Empress has always been concerned about her sister’s only child and from time to time she would send the eunuch to the Mansion to pass on her greeting, often gifting him with supplements. Nan’an Hou asked him to wait for his body to get better, after which time, he could go personally to the palace to thank her.

The two were having a good conversation when that shout took them by surprise. It scared Lu Wancheng so much that he almost fell into the water.

Nan'an Hou knew that his eldest son was frail and weak. Seeing how Lu Wancheng's face paled, his lips turning bloodless, he was, naturally, furious, "Who's talking? Come here!"

Lu Qiaosong and Qiu Momo were 'invited' by Hua Lu to appear before Nan'an Hou. Nan'an Hou said coldly, "And what is this master-servant pair doing making such a fuss in the back garden in the middle of the night?"

Lu Qiaosong put on a bold face and said, "Your son is here to enjoy the moon as well."

Lu Wancheng smiled feebly, "Third Brother does not bring the singers and actresses he raises in the courtyard to admire the moon. Instead, he brings Qiu Momo. What a refined and elegant attitude of mind."

Lu Qiaosong knew he was in the wrong, so he could only restrain his emotions.

Nan'an Hou looked at Qiu Momo: "What were you yelling just now?"

Madam Qiu hurriedly said, "To answer Master Hou, this servant accompanied the Third Young Master to admire the moon. Seeing two people by the pond from a distance, I thought it was Shaojun and Doctor Chang. You must not blame this servant, everyone in the Mansion knows that Shaojun and Doctor

Chang are fellow disciples and share a close relationship, often meeting with each other. This is how this servant misunderstood."

Nan'an Hou said, voice low, "Is there such a thing?"

"Father, Doctor Chang was coming to the Blue Wind Pavilion, not to see Qingyu, but to see me." Lu Wancheng said lightly, "Doctor Chang and I immediately hit it off upon first meeting and shared delightful chats. I asked

him to frequent the Blue Wind Pavilion to accompany me and relieve the boredom with conversation."

Hua Lu echoed his words, "This is true. Whenever Doctor Chang came to the Blue Wind Pavilion, it was to talk with the Young Master. There were even times when the Shoajun wasn't there."

Nan'an Hou's expression relaxed and he asked, "Who is this Doctor Chang?"

Lu Wancheng calmly said, "He's the doctor who's treating Third Brother's kidney weakness."

"Kidney…" Nan'an Hou pointed his finger to Lu Qiaosong's nose and said, absolutely livid, "Explain yourself!"

He'd only known that Lu Qiaosong was sick, but he hadn't known what sickness it was. Lu Qiaosong was someone with a previous record. As soon as the words "kidney weakness" came out, anyone would suspect the same thing.

Lu Qiaosong's face immediately flushed he couldn't have a fit of anger in front of Nan'an Hou. "Father has misunderstood, I just caught a cold…"

Naturally, Nan'an Hou didn't believe him. However, he couldn't very well interrogate him in front of the servants regarding such a matter that violated

public decency. “Follow me to the study.” After that, with a flick of his sleeves, he strode furiously away.

“Father…!” Before coming here, Lu Niantao had repeatedly told Lu Qiaosong that no matter what the other party said, all he had to do was squeeze Lin Qingyu and Chang Yang’s relationship; even if it was fake, he only had to create suspicion. But he never expected that Lu Wancheng would point the finger at him instead.

He wasn’t going to be able to escape this heavy reprimand but he wasn’t going to let Lu Wancheng feel smug about it either.

Lu Qiaosong staggered to stand before Lu Wancheng. A grimace appeared on his face. “With Sister-in-law’s good looks, there aren’t just one or two people who admire him. Dage could bear it this time but can you bear it next time? No matter how magnanimous Dage may be, I don’t think even you can bear that many people casting greedy eyes at him in the dark.”

“Third Brother too knows that he is mine. Since he is mine then I ask you…” Lu Wancheng smiled, and his gaze passed over everyone one by one; seeming to but also seemingly not to, he looked in Chang Yang’s direction. “Don’t move, don’t touch, don’t think.”

The author has something to say: The school grass salted fish gong: My good brother, next time we have a marriage ceremony, I will make sure to personally perform it with you.

21

Chapter 20

Lin Qingyu went directly back to the Blue Wind Pavilion after parting ways with Chang Yang. He had to depend on Hua Lu to tell him what had happened in the back garden. After that, there was news from Sleeping Moon Pavilion; Nan'an Hou had spent the night interrogating Lu Qiaosong. At first Lu Qiaosong, adamantly denied the accusations. Later, Nan'an Hou called over the young page who followed Lu Qiaosong in and out of the Mansion for questioning. Only then did Nan'an Hou find out Lu Qiaosong had spent the better half of last month staying at the land of warmth and tenderness outside.

Seeing that matters had been exposed, Lu Qiaosong then said that he had only sought out qing guans, those who made their living as performers but didn't sell their bodies. He claimed that he merely held poetry contests with them, had wine tastings and enjoyed musical performances; he never overstepped the rules.

When Nan'anhou heard the word "them", he became even more furious. He instantly gave Lu Qiaosong a slap to the face and punished him with self-reflection in the ancestral hall for an entire day and confinement for a month. Nan'an Hou also transferred his anger with Lu Qiaosong onto Liang Shi,

reprimanding her for not properly raising her son. If she could not manage her own son, how could she hope to properly manage such a huge Hou Mansion?

Lin Qingyu heard this and asked, “That’s it? Was there anything else?”

Huan Tong shook his head: “Nothing.”

Lin Qingyu sneered coldly. “Except for self-reflection, it’s confinement. How boring.”

“Shaojun, Shaojun,” Hua Lu hurriedly ran out of the bedroom, “Young Master seems to be sick again!”

It was midsummer, and Lu Wancheng had been craving something cold yesterday. He ate two mouthfuls of red grapes soaked cold in the well water.

Half a day later, he developed a fever. Fortunately, it was only a low fever. Lu Wancheng was still clear-headed but his face looked alarmingly unwell.

Lin Qingyu checked his pulse and asked, “Were the red grapes delicious?”

Lu Wancheng nestled in his quilt, his eyes filled with bitterness. “It was delicious I couldn’t hold back.”

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes at him.

“Don’t be angry,” Lu Wancheng exerted all his strength to pull at Lin Qingyu’s sleeve. “I know I was wrong—cough.”

Lin Qingyu looked down at Lu Wancheng’s hand, so skinny you could see the bones. His original anger disappeared. “Next time you eat so recklessly, I won’t care about you anymore.”

Lu Wancheng smiled feebly. “Your threat is too scary. I’m so scared.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t feel like lowering himself to his patient’s level. He sat down at the table to write a prescription for Lu Wancheng.

Lu Wancheng lay on the bed and sighed. “Why do I get sick every time I try putting on an act even a little bit? Is this Heaven telling me, I am only suitable

for lying down?"

"No." Lin Qingyu said mercilessly, "Heaven is telling you to eat less ice."

With Lu Wancheng's illness, the Blue Wind Pavilion ushered in a period of peace. On this day, Pan Shi went to the Blue Wind Pavilion to visit the sick. Lu Wancheng was resting after having just finished his medicine and it was inconvenient for him to meet with guests. Lin Qingyu met Pan Shi in the front hall for tea and they talked about the general affairs of the Mansion.

Lu Qiaosong provided for many singers and entertainers in the mansion for his leisure time. During this period of time, Lu Qiaosong was confined and couldn't go out to have fun, so he was left with no better option but to seek his enjoyment with them. The embarrassing thing was, Qingdai Pavilion was already unable to make ends meet; those entertainers sang and played their instruments but couldn't get a cent. Several of the entertainers heard that the Hou Mansion was now in the hands of Pan Shi and the Shaojun. And so, they went to Sleeping Moon Pavilion to look for Pan Shi, asking for their monthly wage.

Pan Shi said helplessly, "The Hou Mansion never had any rule providing for monthly-paid entertainers. They used to rely on the Third Young Master's gratuities for their livelihood. Now that the Third Young Master is pulling on

lapels and exposing his elbows, where would he find excess money to reward them?"

Lin Qingyu said casually, "Why didn't they come to me?"

Pan Shi's maid's lips twitched. "How would they dare? It was only because they saw that Pan Yiniang had such a good temper that they dared to make a fuss at Sleeping Moon Pavilion."

Lin Qingyu meditated quietly, and Pan didn't speak any more, for fear of disturbing him. After a while, Lin Qingyu asked, "If you don't give them money, what will happen to them?"

"Qingdai Pavilion cannot support so many people, so they can only be sent away."

"If you send them away, who would be left to please Third Brother?" Lin Qingyu smiled faintly, it even seemed a little compassionate. "Since Third Brother likes them, how can I as his sister-in-law, not help him fulfil his principles?"

Pan Shi's was uncertain about Lin Qingyu's attitude and said tentatively, "Shaojun means…"

"Tell them that the Nan'an Hou Mansion does not raise useless people. Qingdai Pavilion's monthly expenses have already far exceed the limit. Master Hou is already furious about the Third Young Master's kidney weakness. The Hou

Mansion can no longer continue to raise all of them, at most… only half of them can stay. Whether they can stay or not, will be up to them to decide."

Pan Shi didn't dare think to much on it and she merely gave a low sound of assent.

The entertainers in Qingdai Pavilion were mostly orphans, without fathers and mothers. They've finally found a generous master; they could live in the Hou Mansion and eat and drink their fill. If they weren't forced to leave, who would want to?

For all that Lu Qiaosong was loose and dissolute, he was actually quite picky. Though he raised them in his courtyard, most of the time he would only listen to them sing some popular tunes, or have them perform when guests come to boost his prestige. Occasionally, he would choose one of them to bestow his

favor upon. It was precisely because of this that Nan'an Hou and Liang Shi could tolerate them staying in the Mansion.

As domestic prostitutes, the only thing they could rely on was their master's favor. Now that half of them were going to be sent away, they had to struggle and contend.

The next day, Lin Qingyu asked Huan Tong to take out all the medicine jars buried under the tree. He dried them for three days, ground them into powder, put them in incense diffusers and gave them to Zhang Shiquan.

This scent was strong, and once you were exposed to it, would stick for a long time. Lin Qingyu finished preparing the medicine and went to bathe and change clothes before returning to the room.

Lu Wancheng was lying in bed, reading a book. His illness this time wasn't serious; it was just bothersome. His condition showed no improvement nor any deterioration. These short few days, all his body's stores of health,

cultivated over the past months, were mostly consumed. His complexion and lips grew pale and strained. Only his pair of smiling eyes remained unaffected.

Lin Qingyu checked Lu Wancheng's pulse every day before going to bed, and tonight was no exception.

Lu Wancheng sniffed the barely-there scent on him, and asked, "Did you use perfume?"

Lin Qingyu retracted his hand. "No."

"You obviously have." Lu Wancheng approached Lin Qingyu, his nose moved slightly, "What kind of perfume is it? It smells so good."

Lin Qingyu frowned and pushed him away. "The kind you shouldn't smell."

Lu Wancheng understood and said with a smile. "I see. It's poisonous."

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment but didn't deny it.

"Then the question is, who do you want to use poison on? It must be someone who has offended you recently." Lu Wancheng let out a couple of coughs, "Is it Lu Qiaosong?"

Lin Qingyu was silent.

Lu Wancheng said again, "You wrote a prescription some time ago. I asked you

what kind of medicine it was and you said that it was medicine to liven things up. So you didn't lie to me. I remember that the entertainers raised within the Mansion cannot leave the house without authorization. Whatever they want to buy, they would have to ask the help of a page they're on familiar terms with."

"…"

"To sum it up, you want Lu Qiaosong to die in the most unseemly way, during sex. Just because he has humiliated you."

Lin Qingyu's Adam's apple bobbed. Staring straight ahead, he said calmly, "Yes. Why? You don't think he deserves to die? You think my methods are too cruel?"

Lu Wancheng smiled. He said deliberately riling him up, "It seems… a little bit?"

"Oh, think whatever you want." Lin Qingyu looked perfectly calm and collected, "Lu Qiaosong used sexual matters to insult me. He also insulted you. He even wanted to use Chang Yang to destroy my reputation. Even if his crime doesn't deserve death, but his death will make me happy so I'm going to do it—I want to make myself happy, it's that simple."

In front of others, he has never shown himself to be different from his appearance. His parents had good temperaments and they have never done anything to harm others and benefit themselves. Before marrying into the Hou Mansion, he was either with his parents or with his teacher and his fellow

disciples, reading books by virtuous men. It made it easy to suppress his dark side. But as soon as he entered the Hou Mansion, the malice he could not act upon because of others, surged up like a broken well. Fortunately, he was sane and rational; he knew that he was in a situation where he would only bring destruction upon himself if he were to act rashly.

Until Lu Wancheng said that he liked him doing bad things, and even encouraged and helped him do bad things.

It was Lu Wancheng who made him like this. What qualifications did Lu Wancheng have to accuse him of being too cruel?

Lu Wancheng didn't say anything, just stared at him quietly.

Lin Qingyu felt agitated. He closed his eyes and said, "What's more, so long as he follows the doctor's orders and doesn't lay his hands on those entertainers, he may not die."

Lu Wancheng finally laughed and sighed softly, "Qingyu, you really are worthy of being…Qingyu."

His tone seemed admiring; it seemed excited; it seemed fascinated. That slightly low voice made Lin Qingyu chest subconsciously loosen.

Lu Wancheng added, "But…"

Lin Qingyu's face slowly sank once again — Lu Wancheng still dares to add a

“but”?

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “But next time you do bad things, can you take me with you?”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes widened.

“I told you, I like seeing it.”

“…”

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes; his long trembling eyelashes seemed to betray their master’s thoughts.

“Okay? Qingyu?”

Lin Qingyu slowly raised his head, looked unwaveringly at Lu Wancheng and said softly, “Okay.”

22

Chapter 21

From then on, Lu Wancheng paid a lot of attention to the developments in Qingdai Pavilion and asked after Qingdai Pavilion every day. Huan Tong came in from the outside and before he could even speak, Lu Wancheng pinched his throat and said, "Young Master, Shaojun, there's finally been an incident in Qingdai Pavilion!"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Huan Tong looked completely at a loss. "What?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "I'm guessing that someday you're going to say that so I was imitating the way you talk."

Lin Qingyu pulled the rug from under him right on the spot, "First of all, Huan Tong wouldn't call me 'Shaojun'. If you're going to imitate him then at least try to imitate him well. Secondly, for livening-up medicine to harm someone's

core isn't something that can be done in a day." Lin Qingyu couldn't help being suspicious, "Why are you even more anxious than I am?"

"Well, isn't that because I'm bored doing nothing but resting? I'm always coughing and I can't sleep."

Lu Wancheng hadn't been sleeping well lately. He even had swaths of bluish purple under his eyes.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while, and asked Huan Tong, "And what have you come here for?"

"Oh," Watching the two banter, Huan Tong almost forgot his purpose for coming. "Manager Zhang is here."

Lin Qingyu said, "Let him in."

Zhang Shiquan had come this time to tell them of something strange. Among the various businesses of the Hou Mansion, the restaurants and shops in the city along with the villages in the countryside accounted for half of them. The villages in the countryside depended on the weather for their crops. A drought could spell total crop failure for more than half the year. At the beginning of this year, Xuzhou has been suffering from a drought. Strangely, the income of several villages in Xuzhou did not decrease but increased instead. No problem

could be seen on the books, and the grain has indeed been sent to the Hou Mansion's warehouse. It really was quite puzzling.

Seeing Zhang Shiquan so worried, Huan Tong asked, "We received more of the harvest instead of less. Isn't this a fortunate event?"

Zhang Shiquan said, "Seeing as we do not know where this wealth has come from, if it turns out to be ill-gotten, the entire Hou Mansion may be implicated."

Lin Qingyu cast a sidelong glance at Lu Wancheng who was lying atop the luohan. The noble son who was resting on the couch was still ever as relaxed

and content despite his illness. Eyes half-lidded, he remained aloof to matters that didn't personally affect him.

Zhang Shiquan asked, "Shaojun, may I send someone to investigate this matter?"

Lin Qingyu's heart was moved but when his thoughts reached his lips, he changed his words, "No need. In any case, this isn't a deficit in income. I simply don't feel like bothering about it."

Lu Wancheng's eyes opened wide and Lin Qingyu fancied he could even see his ears perk up. He couldn't help finding it all amusing.

Zhang Shiquan said hesitantly, "Shaojun, I think it won't do to handle this matter carelessly. It would be better to investigate it."

"We'll talk about it some other time." Lin Qingyu stood up and said, "I'm a little tired. I'm going back to the room to rest. Do as you please."

As soon as Lin Qingyu left, a worry-wart steward and a salted fish looked at each other.

It was common knowledge that Young Master Hou has always been indifferent to everything, holding himself above all worldly matters. He never asked about the household affairs, no matter how big or small. They needed only to listen

to the Shaojun's orders. Now that Shaojun said not to investigate, although he did not approve of such practices, he could only follow orders.

Zhang Shiquan sighed, "Young Master Hou, I will withdraw first."

"Wait." Lu Wancheng said solemnly, "Xuzhou needs to be investigated, and you must do it yourself. I suspect…" Lu Wancheng paused. "It's not too late yet. You must leave as soon as possible."

Ever since Zhang Shiquan entered the Hou Mansion, Young Master Hou has only given him one order — to share the Shaojun's worries for him, nothing else. Young Master Hou suddenly taking an interest in this matter, he blurted out in surprise, "But Shaojun said…"

"Shaojun is tired, and mistakes in judgment are inevitable." Lu Wancheng said, sounding quite unwilling, "I will reluctantly have to be the one to worry about his inheritance for him."

Zhang Shiquan didn't dare delay and set off for Xuzhou the very next day. After Lin Qingyu learned about it, he observed Lu Wancheng even more carefully.

What should be done, what should not be done; what can be done and what cannot be done; Lu Wancheng could tell more clearly than anyone else. But he

just didn't bother to move; he just wanted to lie flat. It wasn't until no one would help him do it, that he forces himself to do it.

Lu Wancheng once said that he was tired of studying but was still able to take the first place. At that time, he merely took it as Lu Wancheng talking rubbish. Now… he actually believed it.

It was a scorching summer and the intense heat was unbearable. Lin Qingyu had been inside the bath room for a long time. His flimsy clothes had long been soaked in sweat, the feeling of it sticking to his skin was extremely uncomfortable. He stretched out his hand to test the water temperature, and feeling it acceptable, asked Huan Tong to push Lu Wancheng in.

For all Lu Wancheng's laziness, he paid great attention to personal cleanliness. When he was in good health, he would take a bath every day in summer. Lin Qingyu was worried he would catch a cold, so he asked him to wash only every other day. Lu Wancheng was still quite unwilling and wanted to kick up a fuss. Fortunately, the Hou Mansion was a rich household and the servants were

very attentive. When Lin Qingyu got vexed by his fuss, he simply left him to the servants.

Lin Qingyu sprinkled medicinal powder into the bath tub. Hearing movement from the direction of the doorway, without turning his head to look back, he said, “It’s ready.”

Lu Wancheng was a little surprised. “Why are you…”

“It’s been a long time but your cough shows no sign of improving. It’s getting in the way of people’s sleep. A medicated bath before going to bed may help

you get better." Lin Qingyu turned around. He tucked the hair sticking to his cheeks from sweat behind his ears.

The candles were lit in the bath room and mist suffused the air. Lin Qingyu's cheeks had turned rosy from the steam and even his lips seemed to be covered in a sheen of lustrous moisture.

Lu Wancheng let out an "Oh" and silently looked away. Lin Qingyu said, "Huan Tong, help Young Master Hou undress."

Huan Tong said, full of vigor, "Yes, Young Master."

Lu Wancheng allowed Huan Tong to strip off his clothes for him. He asked, "Qingyu, are you going to stay and watch me take a bath?"

"No. The water temperature of the medicated bath is very important. One point higher or one point lower will affect the efficacy, so I want to stay to monitor it."

Lu Wancheng's eyes blinked. "Then you are going to watch me take a bath."

Lin Qingyu's tone grew heavier. "I said I'm not."

Lu Wancheng smiled, "Sigh. What should I do if I am a little shy?"

Lin Qingyu used only ten words to make Lu Wancheng shed his

shamelessness. “Do we not share a profound friendship, my good brother?”

It was as though Lu Wancheng woke up from a dream “…good brother!”

Lu Wancheng was stripped until only his underpants were left on. The two of them helped him into the tub, all the while as he grumbled, “This body is as weak as a chicken. It’s got no abs. It’s so ugly.”

He stayed at home all the year round. Lu Wancheng’s complexion was fairer than some women, and his limbs were slender. It was completely far from being ugly. Lu Wancheng shunned it as ugly probably because he preferred a strong and sturdy body.

The bath tub wasn’t very big and Lu Wancheng only submerged the lower half of his chest into the medicated bath. Lin Qingyu and Huan Tong scooped the

water onto his shoulders so that the decoction would fully soaked his whole body.

The bath room was filled with medicinal fragrance. Mixed with hot water vapor, it made one's breathing run a little bit faster.

Lin Qingyu suddenly said, "Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng was pouring the decoction over himself, "Hm?"

Lin Qingyu stretched out his hand and raised Lu Wancheng's chin, looking carefully at him under the light of the lamp.

Lu Wancheng's heartbeat gradually became unstable. Voice low, he said, "What are you looking at me for?"

Lin Qingyu let go and his lips curved into a smile, "Finally, I understand you."

When Lu Wancheng saw Lin Qingyu's smile, he himself couldn't help from smiling back. "Why do you say that?"

"You appear tired and lazy on the surface, but underneath, you're actually eager to be best in everything. Like me, you don't like the feeling of being subjugated. So even if you hate studying, in order to get first place, you still forced yourself to work hard. Even if your 'mama' hands over heavy responsibilities upon you, to the point that you can't even get your fill of sleep,

you still learn everything well. Even if I don't want to wade through the muddy waters of the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, in the end, you still take action."

He was lazy and didn't like losing; he willfully drifts along but could still win in spite of that. Lu Wancheng was really a strange person.

The smile in Lu Wancheng's eyes deepened. "You're right but also not quite. In the past, when I was studying, some people competed with me. If didn't wish to lose, I could only study. But now, in the Nan'an Hou Mansion, I am someone who's about to die. What is there for me to strive for?" After that, Lu

Wancheng himself seemed dazed. “That’s right, what on earth am I striving for?”

Lin Qingyu said light, “That’s something you should ask yourself.”

Lu Wancheng thought for a while. He raised his eyes to look at Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu’s brows were enveloped in mist; they looked as though they were tinged with affectionate warmth.

“Of course it’s because Young Master Hou need only move his lips in the mansion and someone else would help him do things. It really saves on effort.”

Suddenly hearing Huan Tong’s voice, Lu Wancheng was so shocked that he dove into the water, leaving only his head exposed. “Why are you here?”

Huan Tong scratched his head. “I’ve always been here.”

Lu Wancheng: “…”

After that soak in the medicinal bath, Lu Wancheng slept peacefully that night. When he woke up the next day, his vigor improved a lot and his cough wasn’t

as severe as before. Lu Wancheng couldn't help but guess, "Is this the legendary ' last radiance of the setting sun '?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Yes, we can start helping you prepare for the funeral."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Then I have to think about which clothes to wear when I die."

In the past, Lu Wancheng also used to frequently make jokes about his death. Lin Qingyu had heard it a lot, so naturally, he shouldn't take it seriously. But now…

Lin Qingyu looked at the lush trees outside the window, and slowly clenched his fists.

After lunch, Lu Wancheng went to take a nap as usual. But he was disturbed by the sound of a bamboo flute, making him unable to sleep soundly. Lin Qingyu had Hua Lu go see what was going on. It turned out it was the entertainers Lu Qiaosong provided for in the courtyard playing some music.

Lu Qiaosong's Qingdai Pavilion and the Blue Wind Pavilion were far apart. Usually, the sounds of Lu Qiaosong's life of dissipation wouldn't reach them in their courtyard. But for whatever reason, today, Lu Qiaosong had set up a pipa in the pavilion closest to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Aside from the sound of pipa,

from time to time, the sound of bird song as well as chatter and laughter would drift into their pavilion.

Lin Qingyu said, making no attempt to conceal his words, “Why is he not dead yet?”

Lu Wancheng said, “Your medicine might not be that effective?”

“How could that be possible?” Lin Qingyu said coldly, “I think he too knows that his body is weak, so he doesn’t dare to drink and have fun as much as he usually does. I’ll go and see.”

Lu Wancheng sighed and stood up with difficulty. “Then, I’ll go too.”

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng to the pavilion. From a distance, they could already see that there were many people inside. All these young Gongzi were Lu Qiaosong’s poetry friends. Lu Qiaosong prided himself on being romantic and refined. He often had gatherings with his poet friends. They claiedm to be composing poetry while enjoying wine. Only they knew whether they did things other than that.

Lu Qiaosong was under confinement. He wasn’t allowed out of the house, so his poet friends came to his door instead. But looking at them sitting around

the pavilion, each of them had a nice-looking woman in their arms. There were also a few entertainers under the pavilion strumming pipas.

Lu Qiaosong held a brush in his hand, swiping it in ink. All his friends around him were applauding. A female singer was leaning against him, fanning herself with a silk gauze fan, a smile on her face.

The first to see Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng were the pipa-playing girls. They were all occupants of the Hou Mansion and even though they had never seen Lin Qingyu, they had long heard from others that this Shaojun was not someone to be trifled with. Of the two people that the Shaojun personally dealt with last time, one was demoted to the lowest rank of servants, made to do dirty and tiring errands every day, and the other went crazy and was sent out of the Hou Mansion — that Momo had even been the Madam's trusted aide.

When the girl playing the pipa saw Lin Qingyu, she hurriedly stopped. The music came to a sudden halt, causing the rest of the people to turn around and look. Lu Qiaosong's expression changed, and he threw the brush in his hand onto the painting; the ink slowly smearing onto the paper.

Compared to him, the eyes of his poet friend as they looked at the two people were intrigued. Everyone who knew Lu Qiaosong knew that Lu Qiaosong had a sick elder brother who was not long of this world. In all likelihood, he must be the one in the wheelchair.

The only thing that could be said was that he was worthy of being the eldest son of a noble house. Even seated in a wheelchair, the noble air around Young

Master Hou was hard to conceal. And the one behind him…they were all long time patrons of the brothels, there was no kind of beauty that they haven't seen before, but when they first saw this person, they were still a little surprised and they all exchanged appreciative looks.

Unexpectedly, despite being listless and sickly, Young Master Hou was quite fortunate in love. It was a pity that no matter how beautiful the beauty, he wouldn't be able to enjoy it.

"This must be Young Master Hou," said a young man in a royal blue brocade robe. "I am called Zeng Tianlei. Greetings to Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng propped his cheek on his hand and said with much interest, "Why did you all stop? Continue with the dancing and music."

Everyone looked at each other helplessly. Zeng Tianlei was the type who knew how to live on other's favor. He said with a smile, "Perhaps our merrymaking here has disturbed Young Master Hou?"

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "What do you think?"

Now that he had spoken, the others could finally squarely cast their eyes on him. A man next to Lu Qiaosong seemed to have drank a bit too much and was

unable to even stand steady. He stared fixedly at Lin Qingyu and said, “Qiaosong Xiong, is this beautiful lady your elder brother’s concubine?”

Lin Qingyu’s pupils shrank slightly. His hands around the wheelchair’s handles suddenly tightened.

Lu Qiaosong laughed and said, “Who can compare to Huang Xiong when it comes to having a discerning eye? Come, come, come. Tell me, why do you think he is a concubine, not a proper wife?”

The drunk man spouted nonsense: “If you marry…you must marry the perfect wife, with integrity and talent. A proper wife would be busy assisting her husband and taking care of the children, managing the household. How could she possibly grow such a bewitching appearance?”

Zeng Tianlei whispered, “Huang Xiong, stop talking.”

“Why shouldn’t he speak? What he said was good!” Lu Qiaosong picked up the wine cup, “I, your younger brother, offers a toast to you for your wise words!”

Just when Lin Qingyu was about to have a fit of anger, he suddenly felt someone patting the back of his hand. He heard Lu Wancheng saying with a smile, “My wife is dignified and refined, of an elegant temperament. He clearly has all the markings of a legal wife. Does this brother have eye problems?”

Zeng Tianlei cupped his hand in the other and saluted. He said, “Huang Xiong has offended Shaojun. Huang Xiong has had too much to drink and made

those remarks under the influence of alcohol. I hope that Shaojun will not take it to heart."

"That won't do. Drunk or not, he has said those things. But since you have all come here, then you are all guests and I must give you some face." Lu Wancheng tapped the armrest with the tip of his fingers. "How about we do it this way? This Huang Xiong will be penalized with ten cups of drink. If he accepts, then I shall forget all about this matter. How about it?"

"Ten cups?" Zeng Tianlei said, "Huang Xiong is already this drunk, how can he possibly still drink ten more cups?"

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Since you feel so sorry for him, are you here to drink for him?"

"This……"

What Lu Qiaosong brought out to treat his friends to today were all aged vintage wines. Three cups and it would get to your head; five cups and you'd

be drunk; ten cups and you would die from intoxication, it would take two or three days to recover.

“Isn’t it just drinking? I’ll drink for him.” Lu Qiaosong volunteered, “Come on, serve me the wine.”

Zeng Tianlei stopped him. “Qiaosong, you can’t. The doctor said, your body…”

“It’s just drinking. Who is there for me, Lu Qiaosong, to be afraid of?”

Zeng Tianlei couldn’t stop him and he watched on helplessly as Lu Qiaosong drank one cup after another. When he finished the last cup, he was surprisingly still sober. After drinking the last cup, Lu Qiaosong upended the

cup on the table, wiped off the liquid from the corner of his mouth and looked at Lu Wancheng, as though trying to provoke him, “So, are you satisfied now?”

Lu Wancheng clapped his hands and laughed. “Third Brother is a good drinker.”

Lu Qiaosong coldly snorted, “I’ve finished your penalty. If there’s nothing else, then forgive me for not seeing you off.”

Lu Wancheng smiled lightly. “Wife, let’s go back.”

Lin Qingyu glanced at Lu Qiaosong, his eyes seemed to be looking at a dead man.

That night, a woman’s scream broke the usual tranquility of the Hou Mansion. The noise of a commotion gradually rose. The sound of chaotic footsteps mixed with hushed whispers gradually spread from the Qingdai Pavilion to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Not long after, Huan Tong, charging in in a hurry, finally

said those words “Young Master, Young Master Hou, there’s finally been an incident in Qingdai Pavilion!”

Standing by the window, Lin Qingyu turned to Lu Wancheng and smiled. “Wancheng, would you like to go out and take a look?”

“Let’s go, let’s go.” After saying so, Lu Wancheng was a bit dazed, feeling that there was something not quite right. It took a while before he realized what was wrong and he let out an involuntary chuckle.

It turned out that if you wanted the beautiful villain to change the way he addressed you, you only needed to let him successfully “do evil”. If he was happy, he might call anything.

It was very good, though a bit punishing to the kidneys. But in any case, it wasn’t his kidneys being punished.

Lu Wancheng looked down at where his heart would be and suddenly had an idea.

If… if Lin Qingyu called him by his own name, how would he possibly feel?

23

Chapter 22

When the two rushed to the Qingdai Pavilion, there were already many people inside. However, they were all strangely quiet. Only the sound of a woman's mournful sobbing could be heard. Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng into the courtyard. A few people called out, "Young Master", "Shaojun". But after that, they once again grew silent out of fear. No matter what they thought in their hearts, the expressions on their faces were the same as those participating in a funeral procession.

A woman with disheveled clothes and messy hair was pushed out of the inner room by two momos. Lin Qingyu recognized her as one of the women who played the pipa that afternoon. She casually held together her flimsy robe. A large dark spot stained her undergarment with its mandarin duck embroidery. It was obviously blood that had yet to dry.

In the inner room, Liang Shi, Lu Niantao, and Doctor Zhang were gathered by the side of the bed. Liang Shi was losing her voice from crying. Seeing her tragic state, with tears and mucus flowing profusely, put Lin Qingyu in a very good mood. The comparatively smarter Lu Niantao managed to remain quite

restrained. Eyes rimmed red, she simply wiped away the blood from the corner of her younger brother's mouth.

"Qiaosong, my son — Qiaosong…!"

Seeing this, Hua Lu couldn't help grumbling in her heart. In the past, whenever the Young Master was critically ill, the Madam would also keep watch over his bed, crying in a way that made her the very picture of a weeping beauty, in full possession of etiquette. Who would have thought that she could cry and howl like this when it was her own son who was about to die? She could even go head to head with Qiu Momo.

Pan Shi was accompanying Nan'an Hou in the outer room. In the end, it was his own son who'd suffered this incident and on top of that, it was even something so disgraceful. Nan'an Hou's expression was grave and he appeared even more tired. His usual daring and energetic bearing could no longer be seen.

Seeing the two of them come in, Pan Shi said, "Young Master and Shaojun are here."

Nan'an Hou slowly raised his head. He saw his eldest son, sitting in a wheelchair, dressed in bedclothes with a cloak over his shoulders. His heart became even more pained. He had but two sons. There was no telling until

when the older one would live and now, could it be that the younger son would also be gone?

Seeing that Nan'an Hou said nothing, Pan Shi shook her head, motioning for them to stay in the side room so that they could talk. When there were only three of them, Lu Wancheng asked, already knowing the answer, "What is going on? Third Brother and that woman who was pushed out just now…?"

Pan Shi looked at Lin Qingyu, her expression revealing a bit of awe and reverence.

The number of entertainers in Qingdai Pavilion was going to be cut by half. In order to stay in the mansion, these domestic prostitutes thought of all possible ways to curry favor. There was a singer, who, in the past, would occasionally be allowed by Lu Qiaosong to serve him between the sheets. Recently, Lu Qiaosong had stopped calling for her. She thought that her master had grown tired of her and would want to drive her out of the mansion. In order to regain the master's favor, she had to take action.

Men like novelty and freshness. She entrusted the money she had saved over the years to a young page to bring to her from outside something to liven things up. This something was a kind of incense; after being lit, the fragrance was sweet but not cloying. It smelled extremely pleasant. She didn't dare use too much of it. She simply smoked her clothes with the incense before going to

wait upon Lu Qiaosong. Sure enough, Lu Qiaosong had been attracted by the scent on her body and carried her atop the table right on the spot.

After that, Lu Qiaosong doted upon her once again. She had hopes of giving birth to Lu Qiaosong's children, preferably more sons than daughters, allowing her to stay in the mansion as a concubine in the future. But Lu Qiaosong had just been reprimanded by Nan'an Hou and fear still lingered in his heart. He also had misgivings about his health and didn't dare be as unrestrained as he was in the past. Today, he and his poet friends gathered together. Maybe because they were having too much fun, they didn't watch how much they were drinking and had one cup too many. By the time he returned to the Qingdai Pavilion, he was about ready to pass out from intoxication.

The favored singer stayed in Lu Qiaosong's room to look after him. In the middle of the night, Lu Qiaosong woke up, feeling thirsty. He drank tea and was about to go back to sleep when he was inexplicably aroused by the sight of the beautiful woman next to him and the barely discernable scent on her. It is said that drunk people couldn't perform well in bed but he couldn't restrain himself. He felt his masculinity surge and he vowed to regain his former glory. Until… the scene in front of him gradually blurred; warmth flowed out of his

nose. A plentiful amount of blood had spewed out. And then, blood came flowing from out the corners of his mouth as well…

"Doctor Zhang is treating the Third Young Master now." Pan Shi said, "Judging by his expression, the situation does not seem optimistic."

Lin Qingyu laughed. "It's a pity."

— A pity that he didn't get to see the blood spouting out of Lu Qiaosong's seven orifices. That probably would have been an even better sight to behold than Liang Shi's state just now.

At this time, Doctor Zhang walked out from the inner room. Nan'an Hou hurriedly said, "How is the situation?"

Doctor Zhang closed his eyes and shook his head.

"No, no—Qiaosong, Qiao…"

Liang Shi let out a scream and fell to the ground. She had unexpectedly lost consciousness. Lu Niantao supported her to stay up. Choked with sobs, she called out, "Mother!"

Lu Wancheng turned his head and grabbed Lin Qingyu's sleeve, wiping non-existent tears. "Third Brother, my Third Brother! Were you afraid I would be

too lonely when the time comes, so you went ahead to scout the way for me? …"

Lin Qingyu pulled his sleeve back somewhat disdainfully. "Cry into your own sleeve."

Lu Wancheng whispered. "Alright." Then he lifted his sleeve and hid his face, " The waters of the West Lake, my tears…my Third Brother…"

Nan'an Hou's eyes were rimmed in red. "Doctor, is there really no other way?"

Doctor Zhang sighed, "I'm of humble talent and shallow learning. I hope Master Hou can hold back his grief."

Nan'an Hou seemed to lose all strength. He involuntarily took a step back and slumped down onto the chair. Lin Qingyu has had just about his fill of watching this drama. He stepped forward and said, "Master Hou, would you allow me have a try?"

Lu Wancheng looked up. "Qingyu?"

Nan'an Hou then remembered that his daughter-in-law came from a family of famous doctors. Although he no longer had any hope, he decided to treat a dead horse as though it were alive and waved his hand for Lin Qingyu to enter.

Seeing Lin Qingyu approach Lu Qiaosong, Lu Niantao instinctively stood in his way. Lin Qingyu looked at her calmly. Lu Niantao bit her lip and finally

stepped aside.

Lu Qiaosong, lying on the bed, was already nearing his end, he was at his last gasp. He and Lu Wancheng were half-brothers sharing the same father after all, and so, there was a faint similarity in their appearances. However, even

when Lu Wancheng was critically ill and looked beyond haggard, he still looked a whole lot better than Lu Qiaosong did now.

Lin Qingyu pried opened Lu Qiaosong's eyelids and took a look. He then examined his pulse for him and said calmly, "His life can be preserved."

Nan'an Hou's eyes lit up. "Is this true?"

Lin Qingyu added, "However, I'm afraid he will no longer be able to sire any children in the future."

It was like Nan'an Hou was struck by lightning and he said, voice trembling, "What do you mean he won't be able to sire any children?!"

"In short, it's withered — to the point that he wouldn't even need to be castrated if he were to be sent to the palace to be a eunuch." Lin Qingyu said, "Master Hou, should I still save him?"

Lu Niantao said anxiously, "Of course we must save him! Preserve his life first!"

Nan'an Hou closed his eyes and heaved a sigh, "Save him."

After some tossing about, the sky was almost bright. When Lin Qingyu finished applying the acupuncture treatment for Lu Qiaosong, he saw that Lu Wancheng was still waiting for him. Sitting in a wheelchair, covered with a

thin blanket, he'd waited so long, he was becoming sleepy and he had started to nod off.

Lin Qingyu held up his cheek and said, "Let's go."

Lu Wancheng rubbed his eyes, "You're done?"

"En."

Seeing the layer of sweat on Lin Qingyu's forehead, Lu Wancheng asked, "Why did you decide to save him?"

"I changed my mind." Lin Qingyu looked cold, "It's more interesting to watch him live out his life lower than a pig than to just watch him die."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Indeed."

Disasters befell the Nan'an Hou Mansion one after another. In just a few days, gray hair began to appear on Nan'an Hou's temples. He refused to look at Lu Qiaosong, treating it as though he didn't have this son. Once Liang Shi regained consciousness, hearing that her son had become impotent, her extreme anger drove her to sickness and she couldn't even get out of bed. Lu Qiaosong himself then spent all his time courting death. He refused to take his

medicine and his spirit and body collapsed. Only one Lu Niantao remained to support and take care of both her mother and her brother.

Lu Wancheng finished eating the melon, and said, “Qingyu, this livening up medicine of yours is quite powerful. That day, Lu Qiaosong was already that drunk but you were still able to make him get it up. You are truly worthy of admiration.”

Lin Qingyu said, “He would have been fine if he hadn’t drank alcohol. The alcohol actually stirred up the medicine’s properties in his body.”

Lu Wancheng asked, “Did you formulate this medicine yourself?”

“En.”

“Then you know it best.” Lu Wancheng then said, as though throwing it out there off-hand, “Before, did you ever…”

Lin Qingyu looked at him. “What do you want to ask?”

“Well, I heard that the young masters of most big families, come of age at around fifteen or sixteen. They then might have a maid serving them in their room. You like girls, right? Then have you…uh…cough.” Lu Wancheng got

halfway through before he choked. He waved his hand, “Forget it, forget it. Forget I said anything.”

Lu Wancheng looked so conflicted, Lin Qingyu wanted to laugh, “No.”

The corners of Lu Wancheng’s lips curved. “No?”

“My father only has my mother and I think that’s a very good thing. So, I don’t want some random person in my room.”

Lu Wancheng was filled with deep veneration. Patting Lin Qingyu’s shoulder, he said, “Your thinking is very ahead of the times, ah. Xiongdi, keep that up and your future will be promising.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “What about you?”

“Me? Look at my body. How could I possibly have?”

Lin Qingyu nodded, his expression a little uneasy.

“Don’t be shy, Qingyu. It’s normal for boys to discuss this kind of thing.” Lu Wancheng smiled, “Oh pitiful me, I’m going to die a virgin.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

“Say, how do you think it feels?” Lu Wancheng was a little curious, “Why are

they all so into it? Isn't it tiring?"

Lin Qingyu was indifferent. "You ask me, who do I ask?"

"Then do you want to try…"

Lin Qingyu interrupted him, voice cold, "No, I don't. Get out of here."

Nan'an Hou has strictly forbidden publicizing their family scandals. Nevertheless, there was no wall that didn't leak air and news of Lu Qiaosong's "great achievements" was leaked. It became the topic of idle conversation over tea by the wealthy in the capital. Some people sighed and others regarded it with amusement. In court, Nan'an Hou got wind when he wanted wind and rain when he wanted rain. Who would have thought that his home would be in such a turmoil? Now, he couldn't even leave descendants. A hundred years in

the future and he'd be left scratching his head as to whom to leave his vast family fortune to.

When the Lu clan's branch family learnt of this, they began to get ideas. According to ancestral rules of the family, if Nan'an Hou's line was broken, he would have to adopt a son from the branch family.

Nan'an Hou began to receive many letters from Lin'an and this made him furious. His two sons weren't dead yet and he himself wasn't dead yet. These relatives of his simply couldn't wait to declare him free of any descendants!

After his fit of anger, Nan'an Hou called Pan Shi. "There is something that should have originally been Liang Shi's to handle but you yourself know very well her current condition. She is now no longer fit to handle anything."

Once Pan Shi got the order from Master Hou, she hesitated for a long time and delayed for a few days before seeking out Lin Qingyu. First, she mentioned about the Lu clan's branch family coming to the capital, nominally to pay

respects to their elders during the approaching Mid-Autumn Festival. What they were actually coming for, anyone with a discerning eye could already tell.

“This time the ones coming to the capital is Master Hou’s elder brother’s family. It is said that they will be bringing a lot of people. The mansion during this year’s Mid-Autumn Festival will probably be very lively.”

Lin Qingyu said, “You can handle the matters of providing for the guests and celebrating the holiday on your own. There is no need for you to ask me.”

“Master Hou said the same thing.” Pan Shi carefully observed his words and expressions. “He said that he no longer cared about anything save for leaving an heir for the Lu Family.”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. Pan Shi felt that his bearing was a bit similar to that of Young Master Hou’s. Sure enough, husband and wife who spent time together, begin to look more and more similar over time.

Lin Qingyu’s eyes were filled with pondering. “So you are here to ask me for medicine to help you conceive?”

Pan Shi was startled, then she immediately blushed. “Shao-Shaojun has misunderstood.”

Lin Qingyu was unconcerned about such matters. “What’s the matter? You are only in your early thirties and Master Hou is only in his forties. If you take

good care of your body, it's not difficult to have children."

Pan Shi finally couldn't help it and blurted out, "Shoajun, what the Master meant is that since the Eldest Young Master's body is much better now, he ma-may be able to take a concubine."

Lin Qingyu was a bit startled. Then, he scoffed coldly, "Forgive me for speaking frankly, but rather than counting on him, it would better to have Master Hou put in the effort himself and give him more younger brothers and sisters."

24

Chapter 23

Lin Qingyu refused so decisively and even brought up Nan'an Hou. Pan Shi held both respect and fear for this savior of the Mansion's son. She didn't dare speak much more about it so she quickly moved past this matter and discussed the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Lin Qingyu was a little absent-minded as he listened to her. He'd been careless and he had failed to consider this stage. Lu Qiaosong has lost the ability to carry on the Lu Family's ancestral line. Nan'an Hou would naturally turn his

thoughts towards Lu Wancheng. Although Lu Wancheng has been constantly ill, it wasn't completely impossible if he were to give it his all.

That night, Lu Wancheng returned to their room after bathing and found Lin Qingyu directing a puzzling look at him. He suddenly had a bad premonition. "What's wrong?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "How have you been lately?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "You examine my pulse every day. You would know my condition better than I do."

"I'm not asking about your condition as a patient." Lin Qingyu looked down, his sight landing on a particular spot. He gestured with his chin, "Will it… still get up?"

Speaking of this, Lu Wancheng felt a bit dejected. With grievance in his eyes, "I've been drinking your medicine and you have the nerve to ask me that?"

The side effects of the medicine were temporary. He could recover use of it after a few days of not drinking that medicine or if Lin Qingyu were to give

him an acupuncture session. In other words, whether he could get it up or not depended on whether Lin Qingyu allowed him to get it up or not.

At first, he felt humiliated but then he actually came to accept it. Just as Lin Qingyu said, he had no need for it anyway.

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Then come find me when you need it and I’ll give you an acupuncture session to let you get it up.”

Lu Wancheng was surprised. “Why would I need to use it?”

Lin Qingyu coldly spit out a few words, “To produce a son to continue the family line, to continue lighting incense at the temple.”

Lu Wancheng was a smart man, he should be able to understand with just these few words. Sure enough, Lu Wancheng gave an enlightened smile. “So that’s it. Our Qingyu has been given the talk.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t have the patience to go around curves and skirt corners with him. He asked, “Do you want to take a concubine?”

Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu’s grave expression and nastily, he swallowed down the words “Of course, I don’t want one.” that were on the

edge of his lips. Pretending to be conflicted, “I do but also, maybe not.”

Lin Qingyu raised her eyebrows slightly. “Speak properly.”

“The truth of the matter is, I have lived for almost 20 years and yet, I’ve never even held a girl’s hand. Before I die, it seems it would be good if I could experience the feeling of having that soft fragrance and warmth in my embrace, don’t you think?”

Heh, a few days ago, he’d even been praising him for having had no one else in his room; of having a promising future. Today, he’s longing for soft fragrance and warmth.

This son of b*tch.

Lin Qingyu was about let out some ridicule when he inadvertently caught a glimpse of the upward arc of the other’s lips. He sneered in his heart. Lu

Wancheng was obviously deliberately riling him up and he'd lose if he took this seriously.

Lin Qingyu asked calmly, "And what kind of woman would you like? Tell me so that I can look for you."

Thought Lu Wancheng seemed to give it some serious thought, the answer he gave was rather superficial. "Someone beautiful with a good temper and one who won't be so fierce towards me."

"I see," Lin Qingyu said, "Then I'll pick one for you tomorrow. Go to sleep."

Lu Wancheng was a little dazed. "That's it? Go to sleep?"

"Otherwise? What else do you want to say?"

Lu Wancheng endured and endured but in the end, he couldn't bear it. He asked through the dividing screen, "Qingyu, you don't really want to help look

for a concubine for me, do you? According to common reason, I am your husband."

Lin Qingyu bantered back, "Husband? Where did I get that? I only have a brother with a different surname. I am just helping myself find a sister-in-law. In the future, your children will call me "Uncle Lin"."

Lu Wancheng couldn't help beating his chest and stamping his feet. "Can you stop bringing up that thing about us being sworn brothers?"

"Why shouldn't I bring it up?" Lin Qingyu sneered, "Who was it that was making a fuss at the time wanting to be close friends with me, who wanted to call each other brothers?"

Lu Wancheng was momentarily choked. "Then I regret it now. In any case, back then we didn't make a proper oath with blood so it doesn't count, alright?"

"No, it's not alright. A brother for a day is a brother for a lifetime."

"Then according to what you said, a husband and wife for a night makes for a bond of a hundred nights."

"Indeed," Lin Qingyu ruthlessly exposed him, "but you weren't the one who performed that marriage ceremony with me."

Lu Wancheng was so stifled that he was left speechless. Clutching his pillow,

he gnashed his teeth. “Why the hell didn’t I come a day earlier…”

After that, Lu Wancheng went to see Nan’an Hou himself. The two of them were locked in the study room and no one knew what exactly was said. But Nan’an Hou spent an entire night in the ancestral hall and he started growing a lot more gray hairs. And that was how the matter of Lu Wancheng’s concubine was left at loose ends.

The Mid-Autumn Festival was right around the corner. There wasn’t much left of the scorching summer heat. The sweet-scented osmanthus flowers were in full bloom in the courtyard. Summer clothes were thin for the weather but people were reluctant to put on more layers, as though this would stave off midsummer for a while longer.

The world bursts with life in Spring and withers away in Fall. Since ancient times, every autumn is sad and lonely. Lin Qingyu’s mood was also being affected by the season. For several days now, he has been feeling gloomy. He

donned on a cold expression for everyone. He shut himself in the study all day and the meals Hua Lu served him would go untouched.

Lin Qingyu himself hated how depressed he was. How could he possibly not know that being depressed was useless? It was a pity that he still couldn't shift his emotions so easily.

He was lookly blankly at his book when the door opened with a creak and Lu Wancheng walked into the study with a plate of snacks. He said with a smile, "Qingyu, look at this yummy snack I brought you."

Lin Qingyu said, "Thank you, you can just set it down there."

Lu Wancheng wasn't satisfied. "How perfunctory. You didn't even look at it."

Lin Qingyu glanced at it. It was a newly-baked sweet-scented osmanthus cake. He thought it was have been made from the sweet-scented osmanthus tree in the yard. "I've seen it. You can leave now."

Lu Wancheng made no move to leave. Lin Qingyu knew he was looking at him but he didn't feel like responding to him. He tried to continue reading, but a certain someone's sense of presence was so strong that he couldn't

concentrate. He closed his eyes then raised them and said, “Is there anything else?”

Lu Wancheng said softly, “Qingyu, you’re angry.”

His tone was that of complete and certain assertion.

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “I’m not.” He wasn’t being duplicitous. He was, indeed, not angry now. He simply didn’t feel like talking.

“Is it because I laze around too much in bed and now, I’ve made you angry?” Lu Wancheng went round Lin Qingyu, sticking his head to look around. “Then I won’t sleep anymore, okay?”

Lin Qingyu chuckled, “You? Impossible.”

Lu Wancheng was also very self-aware. “It does seem quite unlikely. Then, what will get you to cheer up?” Lu Wancheng sat down next to him, resting his chin on the table and looking at him, “I could let you touch my abs? Oh no, I

don't have any abdominal muscles now… Then I could let you pat me head?" He said as he moved his head closer.

Lin Qingyu covered his eyes with one hand, and pushed Lu Wancheng away with the other. "Just let me be alone, okay?"

Lu Wancheng agreed though he was very reluctant to do so. "Alright, but remember to eat something."

As soon as Lu Wancheng walked out of the study, Huan Tong immediately came up to him. "Young Master Hou, how is he?"

Lu Wancheng shook his head.

Huan Tong was a little anxious: "What's the matter with Young Master? He hasn't eaten anything all day."

Lu Wancheng thought for a while, and said, "It's probably not about me. Otherwise, he would have immediately told me to take a hike back there. By the way, when is the Imperial Medical Office going to post the list of passers?"

Huan Tong had a sudden realization. "It's today!"

"Sure enough," Lu Wancheng looked back at the thin silhouette on the window,

“This is difficult. It definitely won’t be easy to coax him.”

Huan Tong was weighed down with worry. “What should we do then?”

“What can we do?” Lu Wancheng said lazily, “I’m going back to sleep.”

Huan Tong was greatly disappointed. “How could Young Master Hou be like this? You are too eager to retreat in the face of difficulties.”

Lu Wancheng tapped on Huan Tong’s head. “Believe me, your Young Master just wants to be left alone right now, so let’s non’t bother him. Besides, I believe he can adjust his mood by himself.”

Lin Qingyu breathed a sigh of relief when he heard the footsteps moving farther away.

In the past, whenever Lin Qingyu felt vexed about anything, he could always calm down by losing himself in the company of his medical books. But now, he tried to stare at every word of the book, but couldn’t get in the mood. He was feeling impatient, rash, restless, unable to sit still, he couldn’t get his heart to settle down.

Lin Qingyu left the Blue Wind Pavilion by himself, walking aimlessly around the Mansion. The garden was covered in fallen leaves, they knew all too well that autumn had arrived. When he first arrived at the Hou Mansion, it had

been snowing. Charcoal braziers had been burning insider the mansion. But in the blink of an eye, more than half a year had already passed.

Nan'an Hou was often out and both Lu Qiaosong and Liang Shi were recuperating behind closed doors. Lu Niantao was wearily rushing between both sickbeds. Before he knew it, he had become the true master of the Hou Mansion. The servants were both respectful and fearful in his presence. No one seemed to remember his base humiliation marrying into the Hou Mansion as a male wife through a Chong Xi.

Lin Qingyu looked up at the tall vermilion-colored wall stretching out in all directions. It was like he could still hear the cry of the hawkers from outside. What a lively scene it must be at the entrance of the Imperial Medical Office, four streets away from the Hou Mansion. His former classmates, those who

were inferior to him, those who were jealous of him, were they all standing at in front of that list, searching for their names with both fear and anticipation?

If his heart hadn't gone soft with compassion for Lu Wancheng, letting him live for half a year more, where would he be at this moment?

As the autumn wind blew, Lin Qingyu spread out his hand, letting the sweet-scented osmanthus fall into his palm. He made a wish——

He was willing to fast for seven whole days in exchange for the people he detested to fall off that list.

That's right, this was the kind of petty person he was. He simply couldn't bear seeing the people he hated live better than he did.

Lin Qingyu imagined Tan Qizhi's expression as he failed once again and felt a little better. Suddenly, there was a rush of footsteps behind him. He turned

around and saw Huan Tong, running towards him, out of breath, “Young Master, it’s time to celebrate!”

“What is there for me to celebrate?”

“Tan-Tan Qizhi failed the exam!”

Lin Qingyu was surprised.

Huan Tong said excitedly, “In addition to Tan Qizhi, there’s also Wang Gongzi who said you look like a woman, and Liang Gongzi who slandered you, saying you cheat on the quizzes… Young Master, all of them failed the exam! Isn’t this cause for celebration?”

It was only then that Lin Qingyu came back to his senses. “Did you go to the Imperial Medical Office?”

“Yes, I went to see the list released by the Imperial Medical Office.”

“Who asked you to go?” As soon as Lin Qingyu finished asking, he already knew the answer in his heart.

“It was Young Master Hou,” Huan Tong said, “He said Young Master would surely want to hear it.”

Lin Qingyu’s was experiencing a complicated feeling he couldn’t put in words. Why did Lu Wancheng know even these secret and vicious thoughts of his?

Just who is he!

Lin Qingyu threw down the sweet-scented osmanthus in his hand. “Let’s go back.”

Returning to the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lin Qingyu instinctively looked for Lu Wancheng’s figure. Though Lin Qingyu didn’t see him, he heard a clear whistle like the cry of an oriole.

Following the sound of the whistle, he saw Lu Wancheng sitting on the porch, with his back leaning against the railing. His posture, as always, was lazy and casual. When their eyes met, Lu Wancheng lowered the hand he had by his lips that he’d used to whistle. The final note of the whistle seemed to carry a smile. “You’re back. Come and eat.”

The young man leaned against the porch railing. He smiled, free from any worry of this mortal world.

Lin Qingyu thought to himself — he gave up a once in three-year exam in exchange for half a year of life for this person in front of him. No matter how he thought of it, he had lost out.

Fortunately, that whistle of Lu Wancheng’s had been pretty good; it seemed…it wasn’t a complete loss.

Lin Qingyu smiled, as faint as the moon in the sky. “Alright.”

25

Chapter 24

On the day of the Mid-Autumn Festival, a side branch of the Lu clan, Nan'an Hou's older half-brother brought his entire family from Lin'an to the capital. The two brothers have not seen each other for decades since they divided the family property and went their separate ways. Regardless of the actual relationship between the brothers, on the surface, they still had to go through the motions.

For this Mid-autumn Festival, the entire Hou Mansion was busy from top to bottom. Only the two masters of the Blue Wind Pavilion could be idle. Shaojun wouldn't concern himself over such small matters and Young Master Hou hasn't been in good condition since the beginning of autumn. Before, he used to be able to walk around a bit, but now he was completely unable to leave his wheelchair and had to be pushed around by others to get anywhere.

The head of the Lu clan's branch family sent word in advance, telling them the time of their arrival. When it was almost time, Lin Qingyu and Pan Shi went together with Nan'an Hou to the gate of the mansion to greet the guests. They saw five or six luxurious carriages slowly approaching from the distance.

Lin'an was a rich and prosperous place and the Lu family was one of its most prominent households. The head of the family was Nan'an Hou's eldest brother and Lu Wancheng's eldest uncle. After the two brothers met, they greeted each other politely, with far more courtesy than affection. They then

entered the mansion together. Lin Qingyu followed behind with absolutely no interest in this whole matter. A good-looking man then stepped forward to talk to him, “This must be Lin Shaojun?”

Lin Qingyu didn’t answer, and Pan Shi said, “Shaojun, this is Master Hou’s nephew, Young Master Hou’s cousin.”

“I am Lu Baishuo. In our generation, I am the sixth oldest in the family. If it doesn’t displease Lin Shaojun, you can call me Lu Lao Liu.” The man, with his elegant and smart bearing, smiled, “I am happy to see that Yiniang is well. Luckily, Yiniang still remembers me.”

This Lu Baishuo was a little too overly-familiar and Lin Qingyu had no desire to get acquainted with such a person.

“How could I not remember?” Pan Shi said with a smile, “Shaojun, Sixth Young Master came to the capital to do business last year and he lived in the mansion for three months. He has a very good relationship with the Eldest Young Master.”

Oh, so this person and Lu Wancheng originally had such a relationship.

Lin Qingyu suddenly had the makings of an idea. He nodded in greeting to Lu Baishuo. Lu Baishuo asked, “Is Wancheng’s condition getting better? For my

trip to the capital this time, I brought along a lot of precious supplements. I only hope that they may be of help."

Lin Qingyu said, "If Sixth Young Master has nothing else to do later, you can follow me to visit him at the Blue Wind Pavilion."

Lu Baishuo said, "That's a great idea."

The mansion's servants were busy moving things and taking the guest to their rooms to settle in. After Lu Baishuo was finished settling in, he immediately followed Lin Qingyu to the Blue Wind Pavilion. Before entering the room, Lin Qingyu said, "I wish to ask Sixth Young Master to do me a favor."

Lu Baishuo said politely, "Lin Shaojun, I would gladly hear out your request."

Lu Wancheng has been in good spirits these past few days, but in order to get out of entertaining the guests, he insisted that he had fallen ill once again and it was an illness because of which he could not get out of bed, getting out of bed would mean his death. He thought he could stay well away from those chaotic relatives of his but he never could have expected that Lin Qingyu would actually lead them to his door.

"Young Master Hou, your Fifth Brother is here to see you."

Lu Wancheng put away his usual careless style and assumed the manner of a noble family's son. Just as he was about to call out "Fifth Brother", he caught sight of the uneasy expression of the person beside Lin Qingyu. He gave it

some more thought and let a smile spread across his face, “Wife, don’t make fun of me. How could this possibly be Fifth Brother? It is obviously Sixth Brother.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes narrowed slightly. He said lightly, “Ah, yes. I was mistaken.”

Lu Baishuo breathed out a sigh of relief and said with a loud laugh, “Didn’t I just say so? In any case, I did stay at the Blue Wind Pavilion for three months last year. If Wancheng were to forget me so quickly, it would simply be too heartless.”

Lu Wancheng cast a meaning-laden glace at Lin Qingyu and said, making a show of being earnest, “There is no need for Sixth Brother to worry. Even if you were to turn to ashes, I would still recognize you.”

These cousins were both the talkative type and they both bantered with ease, not the slightest peculiarity could be seen.

But this was not enough to completely convince Lin Qingyu. Lu Wancheng never revealed any flaws in front of others. It was only when he was with his own people that would he openly mention his past. Since Lu Wancheng didn’t want to talk, he would simply wait. Besides, it wouldn’t be too late to coax and threaten him once he truly grew impatient of waiting.

The two chatted happily for a while. Then, the sound of lively bustle could be heard from outside. Hua Lu came in and reported that all his relatives who had

come today had rushed to the Blue Wind Pavilion, saying they were here to visit the sick.

Lin Qingyu clearly saw through their ulterior motives. These people had undoubtedly come rushing for the Hou's Mansion's property. To visit the sick was a pretense and to present a son was their true purpose. Lu Wancheng had married a male wife and because of ill-health, could not take on a concubine. He was destined to remain childless. If they could get their youngest son adopted into Lu Wancheng's lineage, there would be endless benefits in the future.

Lu Wancheng heard the noise made by the children in the yard and immediately raised his hand to rest his forehead upon it. "Qingyu, I suddenly feel dizzy. I'll have to leave the matter of entertaining the guests to…"

Lin Qingyu pretended not to hear. Watching salted fish being forced to stick it out from time to time was its own certain kind of fun. "Please have them come in."

Lu Wancheng: "…"

A lot of people came this time, including Lu Wancheng's cousins, nephews and other descendants. Within the Lu clan, Lu Wancheng's seniority was quite high and there were even some here who would need to address him as 'grandfather'. These people filled the hall to bursting. Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng sat in the main seats. Lin Qingyu drank tea, minding his own

business, not speaking unless necessary. He had made up his mind to make someone “diligent” for once.

Lin Qingyu looked on coldly and Lu Wancheng was left with no choice but to brace himself and treat the guests. Although he was not the least bit willing, if he were forced to do it, he would do it flawlessly. There was absolutely nothing that could be criticized of Lu Wancheng’s manner as he performed everything

without the slightest breach of etiquette. It looked as though both host and guests enjoyed themselves immensely.

“I heard that that one at Qingdai Pavilion still refuses to come out to see anyone.”

“In the end, he’s just the son of the second wife. Creating such a scandal, it’s only natural he wouldn’t have the face to see anyone.”

“As they say, ‘ there is a knife above the character for lust ‘. Our ancestors didn’t lie to us…”

Lin Qingyu saw how Lu Wancheng’s lips carried a smile but the impatience in his eyes was almost impossible to hide any longer. He suddenly realized what fun it was to tease salted fish.

Perhaps sensing his scrutiny, Lu Wancheng glanced back. In an instant, the impatience in his eyes turned into a refreshing breeze and no trace of it remained.

One of Lu Wancheng’s cousins said, trying to flatter him, “I think Young Master Hou’s complexion looks very good. Maybe in just a few days, you’ll be able to make a full recovery.”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “I accept your blessing.”

“As soon as you’re healthy, you should turn your attention to the matter of

producing an heir. What are your plans?"

The one who spoke was the eldest son of the Lu family, Lu Baishuo's eldest brother. The words were so obvious that Lu Baishuo couldn't help frowning, warning aloud, "Dage, this is a private matter for Young Master Hou and his people. We shouldn't concern ourselves with this."

The Lu Family's eldest son was apparently not the sharpest tool in the shed and he said, "This is a matter for the Lu Family and it is closely related to us. What wrong is there in me asking? I heard that Young Master Hou is preparing to take a concubine?"

Lin Qingyu finally spoke for the first time. "Where did you hear that?"

The Lu Family's eldest said with a smile, "Don't take offense, Shaojun. It is perfectly normal for a man to have three wives and four concubines. Although Young Master Hou is ill, he is still a man and as a man, he possesses seven emotions and six desires…"

Lu Wancheng spread out his hands. "What 'seven emotions and six desires' can I possibly have with this body? Even if there was, I have given it all to Qingyu."

He turned to catch Lin Qingyu's gaze, his eyes seemed to contain an expanse of spring water, "Qingyu is my entire passion."

Lin Qingyu almost choked on his sip of tea – What is wrong with Lu Wancheng?!

The guests looked at each other in dismay and then let out heartfelt sighs.

"What was I saying? Lin Shaojun is of startling talent, with the grace of the wind, a celestial being among men, how can anyone else catch Wancheng's eyes?"

"Oh, they are very much in love, the very picture of marital harmony. Oh how we envy you!"

"May grandfather and grandmother be of one heart forever. May you live a long and happy life together…"

Lin Qingyu's forehead twitched. The instigator of this fuss seemed rather guilty and didn't dare look at him. Holding a teacup to cover his face, it was like he was saying, 'I can't hear anything'.

Lin Qingyu interrupted the chatter of these cheap grandsons. "Young Master Hou, it's time to take your medicine."

Everyone wanted to get close to the two of them, but as soon as these words came out, they couldn't be so shameless as to continue to impose on them.

They got up one after the other and took their leave.

After the guests left, without waiting for Lin Qingyu to say anything, Lu Wancheng made a “hiss” sound, wrapped his arms around himself and began to rub wildly. “Save me, I’m so greasy.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t know what “greasy” meant, but after connecting it with the actual situation just now, he formed a vague understanding. He sincerely agreed, “Indeed.”

That evening, Nan’an Hou hosted a banquet in the mansion to entertain the guests. Lu Wancheng didn’t attend, citing physical discomfort, and Lin Qingyu excused himself saying that he would be staying in the Blue Wind Pavilion to look after him.

The twilight clouds had dispersed, leaving the moon and some scattered stars. The light was bright but silent. Laid out on the stone table in the courtyard were moon cakes, water chestnuts, dates and pomegranates. There was even a pot of sweet osmanthus wine. However, whether it was the moon cakes or the sweet osmanthus wine, Lu Wancheng couldn’t have any of it. He could only look to satisfy his cravings.

After looking at the moon cakes for a while, he turned his eyes towards Lin Qingyu beside him. Looking at a beauty at night had its own distinct flavor. Long hair like a waterfall, clothes like frost; the tear-shaped mole at the corners of his eye looked particularly moving under the moonlight. It was a

pity a dark quality suffused the space between the beauty's brows, it seemed he had something on his mind.

A worry on one's mind during the Mid-Autumn Festival could not be anything but homesickness. Lu Wancheng said, "There are so many people in the mansion now and it can really be quite annoying. How about we go stay at the Lin Residence for a few days and come back once they leave?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Your guests are already here and you, the host, still want to slip away?"

"I have already given them enough face today. It's enough, it's enough."

Lin Qingyu declined to comment. Holding a wine cup in his hand, he lowered his eyes and asked, "How did you recognize Lu Baishuo?"

Lu Wancheng said indifferently, "I guessed. I remember that Sixth Brother and 'I' are on good terms. You brought Lu Baishuo by himself so his relationship with 'me' must not be simple. So I guessed that he was that Sixth Brother – And, sure enough."

Lin Qingyu nodded. He poured himself another cup of wine and didn't ask anything else.

"Qingyu, this is the first Mid-Autumn Festival we're spending together and it's also our last." Lu Wancheng looked at the bright moon in the sky and smiled

lightly, “At next year’s Mid-Autumn Festival, will you…will you still remember me?”

Lin Qingyu raised his head and looked at the same bright moon Lu Wancheng was looking at. He said, “Although you and I started off in an ill-fated relationship, as we’ve kept each other company, I have grown to regard you as a confidant and a close friend. Money is easy to obtain, but friends are hard to find. I-… will always remember Lu Wancheng.”

Always remember… Lu Wancheng?

Lu Wancheng was silent for a long when. Then, he suddenly said, “Last time at Changsheng Temple, you asked me if I had any other name and I said no.”

Lin Qingyu’s hand tightened. “En.”

“I lied to you. I still have another name.” Lu Wancheng said in a deep voice, “I hope you can remember this name.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes flashed. He seemed to be a little nervous. Lu Wancheng wanted to make the atmosphere lighter, so he started spouting nonsense in a

serious sounding tone, “My surname is Zhu, and my name is Dazhuang. Besides ‘Wancheng’, you can also call me ‘Big Brother Dazhuang’.”

Lin Qingyu immediately lost all expression and he got up to leave.

Stubborn and unchanging; he must be losing his mind to take someone like this seriously.

Lu Wancheng smiled and stopped him, “Okay, okay. I’ll stop teasing you. Actually, my surname is Jiang, and my name is…”

Before he could finish his words, Hua Lu interrupted their conversation with an urgent shout: “Young Master Hou, Shaojun, there’s someone from the palace!”

26

Chapter 25

Their visitor from the palace was Eunuch Feng of Fengyi Palace. Eunuch Feng was carrying out the Empress' orders, delivering the gifts she had bestowed upon the Nan'an Hou's Mansion for the Mid-Autumn Festival.

Unlike other relatives who they could choose to receive or not, once a decree from the Empress arrives, whether it was Lu Wancheng, Lu Qiaosong of even Liang Shi, they all had to endure their ill condition and accept the edict.

After not seeing Liang Shi for many days, Lin Qingyu now saw that she appeared ten years older; her makeup could not hide the changes brought about by her illness. Lu Qiaosong's eyes were sunken, his steps were weak. It could be seen with a single glance that he had completely been hollowed out. Compared to the two of them, Lu Wancheng, though ill for far longer, still maintained his demeanor. This was thanks to the medicine Lin Qingyu gave him and was also inseparable from his good mentality.

As the only person in the Nan'an Hou Mansion who was related to the Empress by blood, Lu Wancheng's gifts were undoubtedly the most precious. Aside from jewelry and jade, tonics and medicinal materials, there were also two fox fur robes that were paid as tribute from the north, several bolts of silks that were paid as tribute from the south and boxes of pastries of the same kind as those served to the Emperor. All these gifts were to be given to the Young

Master Hou and his wife. In comparison, other people's gifts were obviously given for the sake of mere formality.

After everyone received their gifts one by one, Eunuch Feng said, "Young Master Hou has been on the Empress' mind all this mind. She specially instructed this servant to ask after Young Master Hou's health — How has Young Master Hou been feeling recently?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Thank the Empress for her concern. I've been feeling quite well."

Eunuch Feng turned his eyes to Lin Qingyu. "This must be Lin Shaojun. I heard it mentioned that her Empress had been responsible for the marriage between Young Master Hou and Shaojun. And yet, she has yet to see Lin Shaojun."

Lu Wancheng heard Eunuch Feng's implication and the smile at the corner of his lips waned a bit. Nan'an Hou too heard what Eunuch Feng was trying to imply and he threw Liang Shi a meaningful look. However, ever since her illness, Liang Shi has been absent-minded and even at this moment, she seemed to be in a trance, with a dazed expression on her face. Nan'an Hou had no choice but to say himself, "After the festival, my wife shall be visiting the

palace to greet the Empress. At that time, I will have her bring the family to deliver our thanks."

Eunuch Feng nodded in satisfaction. "That's very good. Then this servant won't be disturbing Master Hou's family reunion."

Nan'an Hou said politely, "Then take care, Eunuch Feng."

Everyone returned to the courtyard with their gifts. Lin Qingyu had Hua Lu pack the things away. It was Hua Lu's first time seeing this silk given as a tribute and as soon as she touched it, she simply couldn't put it down. "I have never seen such a light material, it must be very cool to wear in summer. Tomorrow I will go to the mansion's tailors and have them use this to make new clothes for the Young Master and Shaojun."

Lu Wancheng said, "You can just give it to the Shoajun. I won't need it."

"Eh, why-"

Huan Tong hit Hua Lu with the back of his hand. Hua Lu realized her blunder and closed her mouth, embarrassed.

Lin Qingyu said, "You may all withdraw."

After being interrupted by Eunuch Feng, neither of them were in the mood to continue admiring the moon. Lu Wancheng was always talkative and always

had a smile on his face. Now that he had grown quiet, even if he didn't say a word, you could tell that he was upset.

Lin Qingyu didn't know what was bothering him. He himself was quite vexed. Although he has grown to regard Lu Wancheng as a close friend, this didn't mean that he could forgive this marriage. He hadn't forgotten that it was the Empress who had facilitated his marriage with Lu Wancheng. Because of this,

he may never have a good impression of the Empress, even if she did genuinely care about Lu Wancheng.

After a long silence, Lu Wancheng said, “Qingyu, I… I don’t want you to enter the palace.”

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. “Why?”

Lu Wancheng murmured in a low voice, “I just…don’t want you to.”

Lin Qingyu frowned. “I don’t want to go to the palace to see the Empress either. However, as long as I am admitted to the Imperial Medical Office, sooner or later, I will be entering the palace.”

Lu Wancheng seemed to have sudden realization and he hesitantly said, “Then can you not enter the Imperial Medical Office?”

Lin Qingyu was quiet for a while. His tone somewhat cold, “Are you serious?”

If this was Lu Wancheng truly meant these words, then they would have gotten to know each other for nothing.

Lu Wancheng smiled bitterly, and said, “You best pretend I never said anything.”

On the other side of the mansion, right in front of the servants, Nan’an Hou severely reprimanded Liang Shi. Lu Niantao stood by the door, waiting for the

Nan'an Hou to come out of the room, wishing to put in a good word for Liang Shi. Nan'an Hou said coldly. "You'd better advice your mother to show act like this mansion's mistress. Otherwise… hmph."

Lu Niantao's heart instantly sank.

It was only reasonable that Nan'an Hou be so dissatisfied. His son met with mishaps one after the other, and he, as a father, was naturally heartbroken. But life must go on and the entire Lu Family's honor still rested on his shoulders. Liang Shi was his wife, one with a proper title. He could leave the management of the household to his concubine and his daughter-in-law, but when he was outside, Liang Shi still needed to keep up appearances for his sake.

Lu Niantao understood his reasons. She tried to patiently persuade Liang Shi to pull herself together. But Liang Shi remained disheartened. "Qiaosong is my only son. Now that he's as good as dead, what else can I rely on?"

"But won't Eldest Brother also remain childless? No matter if any of those yiniang give birth to children in the future, or even if Father adopts a child

from the branch, you will still be their dimu. How can you say that you have nothing to rely on?"

Liang Shi said sadly, "What's the use of being a dimu! Over the years, have I not been good enough to Lu Wancheng? And didn't he still turn against me!"

Lu Niantao said anxiously, "Then you still have me, your daughter!"

"A daughter…" Mrs Liang said with a wry smile, "A daughter will marry sooner or later. How could I rely on her?"

"Then it depends on who you marry." Lu Niantao's eyes flashed a bit of conspiracy, "You must have heard of this lines of poem 'Sister and brothers divide the land, pitiful brilliance uplifts the family's status. And so, in the hearts of parents all over the world, to wish not for the birth of a son but the birth of a daughter.' If the daughter marries well, does this not bring honor to her ancestors? — Just look, is this not also the case for the current Empress?"

Liang Shi was stunned, tears still in her eyes. The Empress… has always been someone she dared be angry at but dared not speak to. The Empress' younger sister was Nan'an Hou's first wife. So, naturally she cared not at all for her who was but the second wife. Even her two children were thought nothing of. As for the gifts given to them today, they weren't even a tenth of Lu Wancheng's. For so many years, she has been holding back her anger in her heart. But she was the Empress of the palace and her maternal family was that of Wen

Guogong, who was like the sun at high noon. She was left with no choice but to try and curry favor with her.

“You’re right.” Liang Shi straightened her back. “I can’t go on like this. Mother wants to find a good marriage for you. And when I do, no one would dare look down on us three!”

Lu Niantao had already reached the age of marriage and these past two years, she had been keeping an eye out for her. Many of the wealthy families in the capital were related by marriage and the madams of the houses were all acquainted with each other. If she wanted to find a good match for Lu Niantao, she could no longer shut herself away in the mansion. She needed to move around. Perhaps entering the palace to thank the Empress may prove to be an opportunity.

The next day, Liang Shi made a ‘full recovery’ from her illness. She handed in a request to enter the palace and after receiving the Empress’ permission, she sent someone to deliver a message to the Blue Wind Pavilion, asking Lin Qingyu to ready himself to enter the palace with her.

Lin Qingyu thought it simply ridiculous, “I, a man, am unexpectedly allowed to visit the harem’s palace. It’s simply unprecedented.”

“You can’t say that.” Lu Wancheng, who was lying on the bed, said, “Those imperial physicians who treat the concubines can also enter and leave the harem.”

Lin Qingyu glanced at him. “You sure know how to talk.”

Lu Wancheng said quietly, “Qingyu, I want to go with you.”

Lin Qingyu thought he wanted to see his aunt and said, “There will be other chances in the future…”

Given the honorable identity of the master of the palace, people who were sick were not allowed to enter, lest they bring in with them the aura of illness.

Lin Qingyu normally dressed very plainly but when entering the palace to give his thanks, he needed to put on more extravagant clothes. Lu Wancheng watched as Huan Tong tied a jade belt around his waist. He couldn’t help thinking that he could circle Ling Qingyu’s waist with his two hands – by that, he meant using his original hands, of course.

Once Lin Qingyu finished getting dressed, the grand Chinese robes appeared not the slightest bit bulky, rather, it made him appear untainted by the world. The more Lu Wancheng looked at him, the more uneasy he felt. When Lin

Qingyu was about to head out, he couldn't help but blurt out, "Qingyu, why don't you not go? Just say you've a suddenly fallen ill…"

"I have no objections but can you give me a reason?" Lin Qingyu always knew that Lu Wancheng was hiding something from him.

Lu Wancheng paused and said, "I don't want the crown prince to see you."

"Why?"

After a moment of hesitation, Lu Wancheng pretended to be all relaxed as he said, "Isn't it because you look too good? I'm afraid that grease-ball of a prince might take a fancy to you. Oh, aside from the crown prince, you've got to watch out for the Emperor too. Old men like young and beautiful…"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Seeing Lin Qingyu's expression of "the f*ck I believe you", Lu Wancheng chuckled and said, "Qingyu, I really am afraid."

Lin Qingyu was quiet for a while and then said patiently, "After the Mid-Autumn Festival, is the Imperial hunting party. Right now, the crown prince

and all the other princes should be out in the hunting grounds, accompanying the Emperor. I won't run into them."

Hearing this, Lu Wancheng felt a little relieved. "Are you sure?"

"En." Every year in autumn, his father would be part of the accompany retinue. This, he remembered very clearly.

Lu Wancheng breathed a sigh of relief. "Then, go. Make a good impression in front of the Empress and come back quickly."

Lin Qingyu and the mother and daughter pair shared a carriage to the palace. It was not difficult to see that Liang Shi and Lu Niantao had both dressed up very meticulously. Liang Shi had swept away her former disheartened state. She was dressed in official court clothes; refined, graceful and poised. Lu Niantao wore smoky blue skirts of silk. She was like a Lotus flower just appearing above the water; appearing fresh and clean enough to move those who saw her.

The carriage came to a stop the gate of the palace. They had to go the rest of the way on foot. Lin Qingyu looked up at the plaque high atop the palace gate

— A year ago, he never would have imagined that the first time he would be entering the palace would be as a male wife.

The three followed after the eunuch who was leading the way to Fengyi Palace. Eunuch Feng, whisk in hand, was there to greeted them. “Madam, Shaojun, Young Miss, you’re all here. Please follow this servant in.”

In the main hall of Fengyi Palace, Lin Qingyu met the mother of the Dayu, Empress Wen.

Empress Wen and Liang Shi were similar in age. Though getting on in the years, but as the mother of the country, her imposing manner was unmatched

by anyone. She invited the three of them to sit and she exchanged lukewarm greetings with Liang Shi before she turned her focus on Lin Qingyu.

With such features and bearing, though he was born ordinary, he did indeed make a good match for her sister's only son.

Empress Wen said, "I heard that Wancheng's body has improved a lot since you married into the Hou's Mansion. It seems my request to the Emperor to bestow this marriage upon you two was not made in vain."

Like it was some great favor.

In his heart, Lin Qingyu was absolutely disgusted. But he knew that the palace was different from the Hou's mansion, and right now, in front of the Empress, the only thing he could do was to endure.

Empress Wen spoke again, "Are you the one looking after Wancheng's health now?"

Lin Qingyu caught a whiff of the unique incense of Fengyi Palace and said, "Yes."

Empress Wen nodded approvingly. "As expected of the son of Lin Yuan Pan."

Empress Wen's words all revolved around Lu Wancheng. Save for the initial courtesy, she never said a word to the mother and daughter pair. Mother and

daughter were left out in the cold, but they had to maintain respectful smiles on their faces.

As they were talking, Eunuch Feng came in and reported, “Empress, His Royal Highness, the crown prince, is heading towards the Fengyi Palace. He must be coming to pay his respects.”

Lin Qingyu frowned slightly — Why would the crown prince appear in Fengyi Palace at this time?

Empress Wen too had the same question. “Didn’t the crown prince go hunting with the Emperor?”

Eunuch Feng said, “The Emperor accidentally caught a cold and returned early.”

Although the crown prince was borne by Concubine Chen, the Empress was his dimu, after all. When he returned from going out, he naturally wanted to come to Fengyi Palace first to greet her.

Lin Qingyu was not at all afraid of seeing the crown prince but since Lu Wancheng didn’t want him to see him then he wouldn’t.

Lin Qingyu got up and said, “Since the crown prince is here, we shall be taking our leave first.”

Lu Niantao opened her mouth, as though to say something. Empress Wen

nodded in agreement and asked Eunuch Feng to guide them out of Fengyi Palace.

Walking out of Fengyi Palace, Lin Qingyu saw a young man, with a jade crown on his head and donning dark-colored dragon-pattered robes, coming from a distance. He immediately picked up his pace. Lu Niantao, who was with him, said, “Why is Sister-in-law in such a hurry to leave? The Crown Prince is right in front of us. Would it not be rude if we don’t go to greet him and pay our respects?”

Lin Qingyu said coldly, “And you, an unmarried girl, taking the initiative to greet him, would be considered polite?”

Lu Niantao was shamed into silence, her face flushing red. And yet, it was as though she had grown roots under her feet and she was unwilling to take another step. Because of her delay, the crown prince had already arrived in

front of them and Lin Qingyu was left with no choice but to salute with Eunuch Feng. “Greetings to Your Royal Highness.”

The prince possessed an outstanding appearance. He was handsome and refined. Moreover, as the heir to the throne, he had a distinguished status. It was no wonder that Lu Niantao has such designs.

Towering above them, the crown prince looked down at them. His eyes swept past Liang Shi and Lu Niantao, falling on Lin Qingyu. “Who are you? How are you able to visit the imperial harem?”

Eunuch Feng said, “Your Highness, this is the Nan’an Hou Mansion’s Shaojun,

Lin Yuan Pan's son, Lin Shi."

"Shaojun," the prince narrowed his eyes, "That male wife?"

"Exactly."

The crown prince said with great interest, "Look up."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"Didn't you hear me talking to you?"

I can't hear you; go away.

Lin Qingyu took a deep breath. Eyes lowered, he slowly raised his head.

The crown prince caught sight of the teardrop mole at the corner of his eye and his pupils suddenly shrank, his breathing becoming rapid.

Eunuch Feng has been in the palace for many years and he was accustomed to discerning a person's thoughts from their body language. He reminded quietly, "Crown Prince, the Empress is waiting for you."

It was as though the crown price woke up from a dream. He realized his gaffe,

but his eyes remained firmly locked on Lin Qingyu. “What is your name?”

“…Lin Qingyu.”

“Lin Qingyu.” The corner of the crown prince’s lips ticked up and he said with a half-smile, “I’ll remember you.” After saying so, he turned around and entered the Fengyi Palace.

Suddenly, Lin Qingyu felt that Lu Wancheng’s “Qingyu is my entire passion.” didn’t sound so greasy.

Back in the mansion, Lin Qingyu changed out of his fancy clothes and found Lu Wancheng in the bedroom. Lu Wancheng seemed to have been fighting off

sleep for a long time. He yawned and said, “You’re back? Hey, why did you change your clothes? I haven’t gotten to see you in it enough yet…”

“I saw the crown prince in the palace today.”

Lu Wancheng was stunned for a moment. Then his sleepiness was swept clear away. “How come?”

Lin Qingyu told him all that had happened at Fengyi Palace. As Lu Wancheng listened, his eyes gradually became hazy and he leaned back. He whispered, “… F*ck.”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. “Is there any problem? The crown prince, he…”

Lu Wancheng pondered for a moment and asked, “Greasy?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “A little bit.”

Lu Wancheng gave his usual smile. “The two of you have met, there’s no helping it. Doctor Lin, you are free to do what you want. Leave the rest for others to worry about.”

The night, Lin Qingyu was woken from his light sleep by a quiet cough. He opened his eyes and saw candlelight behind the screen. He got off the luohan and walked around the screen. He saw Lu Wancheng sitting at the table, dressed in his sleepwear, a coat draped on his shoulders. As he coughed, he was

writing something. Seeing him coming, he said, “Did I wake you up? Sorry, I couldn’t hold back…cough.”

Lin Qingyu poured him a glass of warm water. “It’s so late, what are you doing up instead of sleeping?

Lu Wancheng stopped writing, pressed his fist to his lips and let out a couple of coughs. He said, “I’m thinking about something.”

Lin Qingyu looked down and saw several names and two strange symbols written on the parchment: [Northern Region], Xiao Cheng & Chen Huaishi (?), Xiao Jie & little eunuch, Xiao Li (X) & Empress.

“Xiao Cheng, Xiao Jie, and Xiao Li are the names of the three princes.” Lin Qingyu lowered his voice, “Wancheng, just what are you thinking about?”

Seeing Lin Qingyu’s grave expression, Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “I’m just writing whatever, don’t worry about it.” Saying so, he folded the parchment in half and burned it using the candle’s flame.

Intuition told Lin Qingyu that Lu Wancheng wasn’t doing something so simple as writing casually. He… had a scheme that involved the princes.

Why?

Lu Wancheng wasn’t in the habit of leaving the mansion. Even if the Empress was his biological aunt, he never tangled with any of the forces in the palace.

Could it be for the Nan'an Hou Mansion?

Nan'an Hou was an important minister of the court. He was highly regarded by the Emperor precisely because he never involved himself in political disputes. So long as he keeps within hounds, remain loyal to the Emperor and to the crown prince in the future, the Nan'an Hou's Mansion would continue to prosper. Lu Wancheng didn't need to do anything at all.

Then, that's for…

Lin Qingyu asked softly, "—Is it for me?"

Lu Wancheng was momentarily silent. Half-truth and half-lie, he said, "That's right, look how good I am to you. I'm one step away from kicking the bucket and here I am, still worrying about this one last thing for you." One hand dragged his cheek while the one subconsciously began to turn. Under the radiant candlelight, he directed a smile at Lin Qingyu. "That's why this autumn, you have to be a bit gentler with me. You can't act fiercely at me, okay?"

Ink stains swirled from the tip of the pen. As Lin Qingyu looked at the dark spots that fell on his bedclothes, he couldn't tell what it was he was feeling.

27

Chapter 26

A spell of autumn rain and a cold, carried away the last trace of summer heat. Before the rain fell in the hall, a large water vat had been placed in the hall; the rain water kept striking the surface of the water, the sound of splashing fell incessantly on the ears.

Hua Lu passed by the study and saw that the window was open and that the lamp was still lit. She thought it was the Shaojun reading in the study, but when she walked in, she found that it was her family's Eldest Young Master sitting hunched over at the desk.

Hua Lu checked repeatedly. She wiped her eyes several times and made sure she wasn't seeing wrong. She asked, "Eldest Young Master, what are you doing in the study?"

The Eldest Young Master only ever came to the study to annoy Shaojun. But right now, Shaojun wasn't even here.

Lu Wancheng said, as though he had nothing left to live for, "I'm solving a problem."

"Solving a problem?" Hua Lu leaned forward and glanced at it. The writing on the paper was a mess, she couldn't understand it anyway. She reached out to

close the window, but Lu Wancheng stopped her. “All this thinking is making me dizzy. I want some air blowing in for a bit.”

“That won’t do, Young Master.” Hua Lu firmly closed the window, “Shaojun said, you can’t be exposed to the cold wind now.”

Lu Wancheng dropped the pen and slumped against his wheelchair. “I have a headache, I’m so damn tired. I don’t want to think anymore.”

He has already been thinking seriously for an hour. The high-intensity mental work was really exhausting. It reminds him of the miserable days when he had to muddle through his homework even though he was already sick of studying.

Hua Lu thoughtfully put away the pen, ink, paper and inkstone. “If Young Master is tired then just go and sleep first.”

Lu Wancheng looked out the window. The sky was covered by gray clouds and the autumn rain was drizzling outside. It was indeed weather most suitable for sleeping. He has been diligent working for an hour, it was time to lie down.

Lin Qingyu had just changed into his inner robe after having finished his bath. He heard the door open with a creak behind him and damp cold wind came rushing in. Lin Qingyu turned around, meeting the eyes of the person who came. He said indifferently, “You’re back.” His long hair was only half-dried, and it fell on his chest, soaking his inner robe. In order to fit the body

comfortably, the inner robe was made of silk, which was easily permeable by water.

Although Lin Qingyu was forced to marry, in the end, he was still only eighteen years old. His figure was much more slender and a lot less developed than that of an adult man in his twenties or thirties. His body, untainted by even a speck of dust, seemed both hidden and visible under the translucent silk.

Lu Wancheng was slightly startled. He then looked away and said, “What kind of bath is taken in the daytime?”

Lin Qingyu also knew that the way he was dressed right now wasn’t very dignified. He was a little uncomfortable at first, but seeing Lu Wancheng even

more uncomfortable than he was made him feel a little more at ease. “Is there any Hou Mansion rule saying that you can’t bathe during the day?”

“No, but its easier for you to get seen if you take a bath during the day.” Lu Wancheng teased rather indecently, “See? Didn’t I catch you? Are you angry?”

Lin Qingyu became calmer. “I’m not angry. You and I are both men and sworn brothers too. I don’t mind.”

Lu Wancheng covered his chest. “If you mention the word ‘sworn brothers’ again, I’m going to vomit blood for you to see.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes flashed. Given Lu Wancheng’s current condition, once he vomited blood, it really would be time to prepare for his funeral.

“Fine, I won’t mention it.”

Lu Wancheng instantly had on a very flattered expression. Seeing that his complexion wasn’t looking too good, Lin Qingyu helped him onto the bed and

examined his pulse for him. “It seems you haven’t been sleeping very well lately?”

“Isn’t it because of my cough? It would be strange if I could sleep well.”

Lin Qingyu saw through him but didn’t expose him, simply saying, “People who have been ill for a long time should avoid mental stress. Wancheng, no matter what it is, you have to relax.”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “I will try my best.”

After the autumn rain, the sky turned clear and bright. Lu Wancheng’s condition also took a slight turn for the better. The Lu Clan’s branch family, after having stayed for a little less than half a month at the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion, was finally leaving. Lu Baishuo came especially to the Blue Wind Pavilion to bid farewell to the two of them, saying that they would be leaving for Lin’an tomorrow.

Lu Baishuo was quite emotional. When he had come to the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion last year, Lu Wancheng was not so ill. From time to time, he had been invited to go out and have fun together. On the occasion of his parting, Lu Wancheng had even treated him the capital’s most prestigious Jinxiu Xuan.

Jinxiu Xuan was a restaurant by the river. Their signature “Hun Yang Mo Hu” shocked Lu Baishuo who had been visiting the capital for the first time. After Lu Baishuo returned to Lin’an, he searched for northern chefs everywhere,

trying to recreate that Hun Yang Mo Hu. However, the taste always fell short by that little bit.

Lu Wancheng laughed when he heard it. “Sixth Brother might as well have the words ‘Quickly invite me to Jinxiu Xuan’ written on his face.”

Lu Baishuo said embarrassed, “Where? Where? I was just saying it offhand. But, to tell you the truth, I did go to Jinxiu Xuan yesterday. However, I was told by the attendant that the private rooms have already been reserved for the next three days. Alas, as expected of the capital. I should have gone earlier.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Did you say that you are a guest of the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion?”

“That, I didn’t do.” Lu Baishuo said in surprise, “It’s just for a meal. Do you have to introduce yourself for that?”

Lin Qingyu said, “In the capital, there are influential official everywhere. Exalting those above and stamping on those below is common; especially in places like Jinxiu Xuan, where nobility and high-ranking officials gather. If you really want to go, you can ask Young Master Hou to accompany you.”

Lu Baishuo looked expectantly at Lu Wancheng. “Is that alright? Wancheng’s condition…”

Lin Qingyu said, “He just needs to be watched over carefully.” Recently, Lu Wancheng’s thoughts have obviously grown heavy, which was not conducive

to recuperation. Going out to relax a bit wasn't a bad idea.

Moreover, if he didn't go out now, Lu Wancheng might… he might not have another chance to go out to relax.

Lu Wancheng thought for a while, then asked with a smile, "Qingyu, we've never had the chance to go out together to look around, have we?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. Since their wedding, he has only gone out with Lu Wancheng twice. Once to go back to the Lin Residence and the other, to Changsheng Temple. Both times, they'd ridden the carriage to get there. It has been a long time since he's seen the prosperity of the capital.

"Then how about you and I go to Jinxiu Xuan for dinner? While we're there, I'll have an order of Hun Yang Mo Hu packed to present to Sixth Brother when we come back."

"Alright."

Lu Baishuo thanked the two of them, feeling that something wasn't quite right.

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng out the door. He also brought Huan Tong and several guards from the Hou Mansion with him. At the entrance of

Yongxing Street, Lin Qingyu stopped the carriage. “It’s not far from Jinxiu Xuan, let’s walk the rest of the way.”

Lu Wancheng said, “But walking is very tiring.”

Lin Qingyu was speechless. “Would we let you walk?”

“Am I not just concerned that you might grow tired from pushing me?”

Lin Qingyu paused and said, “It’s fine.” No matter what hardship, it was only going to be for two or three months more.

Lu Wancheng laughed softly and said, “Qingyu, you’ve been so gentle lately. I’m not used to it.”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently: “And I’m not used to your recent lack of chatter.”

Lu Wancheng was silent for a while. Then, he smiled, “Have I been that lately?”

Lin Qingyu refused to comment and pushed Lu Wancheng into the crowd.

At this time, it was still early to have dinner. All the shops hung their signboards high in front of their door. Hawkers of the stalls called out one after another. The people passing by included not only ordinary people but also many well-dressed that marked them as coming from wealthy families.

Anyone who saw the immortal-like beauty pushing the son of nobility in a wheelchair down the street couldn't help but turn their head to take a look.

Fortunately, both of them are used to being the focus of people's attention and didn't think much of it. Huan Tong took a deep whiff and said, "Young Master, do you smell roasting chestnuts?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Go buy some if you want."

Huan Tong said happily: "I'll go here!"

Lu Wancheng also took a sniff. "Why can't I smell it?"

In severely ill people, it was common for their five senses to become blunted. Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment and said, "Let's go over there and have a look."

The two came to stand in front of a stall. The vendor was selling all kinds of jewelry. Although the materials were cheap, their styles were elegant and varied. There were many novel and special designs. Among them, there were jade crowns and hair clasps that men use to tie their hair. Lu Wancheng thought that Lin Qingyu wanted to buy some jade crowns, so he carefully

helped him choose two. Lin Qingyu ignored him and picked up a woman's buyao. He weighed it a little then paid for it.

Lu Wancheng asked, "Are you going to give it to your mother-in-law?"

"No, it's for you."

"For me?"

"A buyao is about the same length as a brush. In the future, whenever you want to fiddle with a brush, just fiddle with this. I don't want to be woken up in the middle of the night and have to change clothes."

Lu Wancheng took the buyao with a smile and really did twirl it in his hand. He teased, "No matter how gentle Doctor Lin is, he still remembers is enmities so clearly."

As they walked, they finally found themselves at Jinxiu Xuan. Upon learning that they were the Young Master and Shaojun of the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, the shopkeeper said no more and immediately ordered someone to take them to a private room.

Jinxiu Xuan had two floors and the best spot was by the windows on the second floor. Looking out, you were given a view of the river and looking in, you could see the stage. On the stage, were a few entertainers playing the zither, regaling the patrons with music. The sound of the zither was clear and

melodious, deep and far-reaching. The women who playing the zither was also elegant and beautiful, charming and graceful.

Hearing the music, Huan Tong became very enthusiastic and seeing the girls, he became even more energetic. He asked Lin Qingyu, “Young Master, who do you think looks better, the girl in blue or the one in pink?”

Lu Wancheng thought that Lin Qingyu wouldn’t answer such a senseless question, but Lin Qingyu said, “They both look good.”

Lu Wancheng: “…”

Seeing that the somewhat complicated expression on Lu Wancheng’s face, Lin Qingyu asked, “What is it?”

“It’s nothing.” Lu Wancheng said quietly, “I almost forgot that you like women?”

Lin Qingyu said, “What does this have to do with liking men or women? Everyone knows how to appreciate beauty.”

Lu Wancheng raised his eyebrows. “Then let’s get closer to admire it better?”

“Alright.” Lin Qingyu wasn’t interested but Lu Wancheng wanted to see, so he had no objections. He pushed Lu Wancheng out of the private room and they

stopped beside the railing.

With Lin Qingyu standing there, the guests on the second floor all stopped listening to the song; they were also distracted from admiring the women. One by one, they all turned to look at him. Fortunately, they all knew that the guests on the second floor were all wealthy and respected people and so they dared not look too blatantly. Sitting opposite the two of them, separated by a bit of distance, was a man in dressed in dark clothes. Lin Qingyu met his gaze, and his eyes instantly turned fierce.

Lu Wancheng followed his gaze and asked, “Who is that?”

“The crown prince.”

Lu Wancheng’s lazy eyes suddenly opened.

The crown prince’s name was Xiao Cheng and he was the eldest son of current Emperor. Like the Nan’an Hou, the Emperor fate for sons was weak. Even having a harem that numbered in the thousands, he had but scant few sons who’ve grown up safely. When finally, after much difficulty, the Empress become pregnant and was expected to give birth to a young son, who could have expected that she would give birth to a foolish child? However, no matter how few princes there are, fights for the throne cannot be avoided. Xiao Chen

and his concubine mother plotted for many years, and finally became the biggest winner and entering the East Palace three years ago.

Xiao Cheng looked unabashedly at Lin Qingyu, the corners of his lips ticked up, showing great interest. Looking just like ths at Lin Qingyu, took a sip of his wine cup and then summoned the imperial bodyguards, instructing him.

Lin Qingyu retracted his gaze and said, “Let’s go back in.”

Lu Wancheng said, “No hurry, we’ll just quietly watch him pretend.”

The guard held the wine cup that Xiao Cheng had just drank out of. He walked halfway around to the two of them, and said, “Greetings to Young Master Hou,

Lin Shaojun. This cup of wine is being given to Shaojun by His Royal Highness the Crown Prince. He hopes Shaojun would kindly accept."

Lin Qingyu glanced at the wine cup, feeling only that it was dirtying his eyes. "There is no need for me to accept. I don't drink."

The guard's expression changed, and he said, "Lin Shaojun, with all due respect, do you understand whose wine it is you are rejecting?"

"Naturally. It's the crown prince's wine." Lu Wancheng murmured, "Or was it perhaps the wine of the gods?"

The guard's expression turned even uglier. "Does Young Master Hou and Shaojun really wish to reject His Highness's kindness?"

Lu Wancheng laughed and his laughter was chilling. "Go back and tell the crown prince, just tell him – it has been three years since Princess Jingchun has been married off to the North."

Princess Jingchun?

Lin Qingyu remembered the name. The Princess Jingchun was originally a handmaid under the Shangyi Bureau. Because of her beauty and charm, her bright eyes and kindly manner, she was favored by the King of the North who had come visiting from afar three years ago. The King of the North fell in love

at first sight with Jingchun and immediately asked the Emperor to allow her to marry him.

The people of the northern territory was a frontier tribe and they have had constant disputes with the current dynasty for many years. In order to stabilize the border, the Emperor personally conferred the marriage, appointed Jingchun as a princess and betrothed her to the king of the north. He had even asked the crown prince to preside over the two's wedding ceremony to show his sincerity.

——Why was Lu Wancheng mentioning this person in front of the crown prince?

The guard was left with no choice but to go back and relay his message. Hearing this, Xiao Cheng suddenly raised his head and stared intently at Lu Wancheng's face, as though he could glean some clue from it. But no matter how much he looked, he could nothing but a sickly seedling with a smile on the corner of his lips.

Their group returned to the private room, where Huan Tong said very uneasily, "Young Master Hou, Young Master, that was the crown prince… The

future Emperor. Offending him like that, will he have our heads chopped off in the future?"

Lu Wancheng said to deliberately scare him, "It's very possible. But by then, I would already be long under the ground and he wouldn't be able to cut off my head."

Huan Tong was about to cry from fright. "Young Master Hou…"

Lin Qingyu suddenly said, "Indeed. That's why you shouldn't have to worry about this matter."

Lu Wancheng was momentarily silent. He then said lazily, "Alright, I shall listen to Doctor Lin."

After this incident, the two of them were no longer in any mood to play. They quickly ate dinner and returned to the Mansion with an order of Hun Yang

Mo Hu. After staying out for half a day, Lu Wancheng was already exhausted. After washing up, he lay on the bed to rest.

It was still early and Lin Qingyu didn't feel at all sleepy so he headed to the study. He has taken quite an interest in fragrances lately and he has been trying to recreate the incense he smelled in Fengyi Palace that day.

Suddenly, it started to rain outside. Amidst the hazy night rain, Lin Qingyu suddenly caught sight of a figure outside the window.

Lin Qingyu opened the window, only to see Lu Wancheng, cloak draped over his shoulders, holding onto the window edge. His long hair was scattered and he was short of breath, as if it had taken all his strength to walk all the way from the bedroom to here.

Lin Qingyu was stunned. "Why are you… Where are the servants?"

Lu Wancheng sidestepped the question. "I can't do it."

"What?"

"I can choose not to care about other things and I don't feel like caring about them either. But this matter, I can't just not worry about it." Lu Wancheng looked at him and said solemnly, "You were born to reach high as a mountain.

Even if you keep on doing evil things, I can never allow you to be reduced to mere nothing."

Lin Qingyu's eyes opened wide.

The cold air invaded his body and Lu Wancheng was overcome with a heart-rending coughing fit. As if he could no longer keep standing, he slowly slipped against the wall. Lin Qingyu quickly walked out of the study and shielded him from the wind and rain with his body. "Stop talking and get in the room first."

Lu Wancheng grabbed his arms and murmured in a low voice, "That's why I must find the best solution that will take care of this problem once and for all."

Lin Qingyu grew silent. He had never seen such a Lu Wancheng before; it was as though he were tied down by shackles he couldn't break free of. He was

completely different from the young man who was leisurely whistling on the porch that day.

He had always disdained Lu Wancheng for being too lazy, too big-hearted to care about anything. But now, instead, he hoped that Lu Wancheng could spend what little time he had left as simple and unthinking as before.

After an unknown length of time, Lu Wancheng's grip suddenly tightened, breaking the silence, "Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu said, "I'm here."

"I think," a darkness flashed Lu Wancheng's eyes, sharp and deep, but in the end, he was ill after all and his face remained pale, his mouth reeked of blood and his lips were as red as blood, "… I want Xiao Cheng's life."

Lin Qingyu's chest grew slightly hot. He turned his hand over and held Lu Wancheng's trembling wrist. He said warmly, "En, do you need help?"

28

Chapter 27

The crown prince, the heir apparent to the throne, the future emperor — wanting his life was tantamount to regicide, to treason. If they were exposed, their entire families would be executed as punishment. There were only the two of them; a man who was seriously ill and dying, and a male wife, trapped in the inner courtyard. Even having an audience at the palace was not be an easy matter, let alone gaining entry to the East Palace located deep within and to the side of the crown prince who had shadow guards following him everywhere.

Perhaps, they were merely striking a stone with an egg, following a path that led to their own destruction. But Lu Wancheng wanted Xiao Cheng dead and he also wanted Xiao Cheng dead, so they were going to do it. The maids of the previous dynasties were able to assassinate the Emperor in his sleep, so why couldn't they take the life of a mere prince?

Before that, Lin Qingyu had never thought about attacking the prince. At most, he'd been entertaining thoughts of going against the Empress. The prince had nothing to do with the marriage and thus, wasn't on his list for revenge. But offering that half-drank cup of wine at Jinxiu Xuan today had truly disgusted him.

As a man, he naturally knew what the crown prince meant by the way he looked at him. Being married Lu Wancheng as a male wife was one thing, but

for someone to dare to seize him by force, even if that someone were the heir apparent to the throne, this was something he could never tolerate.

Lu Wancheng was still alive so Xiao Cheng wouldn't do something excessive for the sake of Nan'an Hou's honor. Once Lu Wancheng died of illness, Xiao Cheng would most likely set his designs upon him. Rather than sitting still and waiting for death, it was better to gain the initiative by striking first.

On the surface, he was helping Lu Wancheng, but in reality, Lu Wancheng was helping him.

Feeling the warmth in Lin Qingyu's hands and the faint smell of books on his body, Lu Wancheng's breathing gradually calmed down. For a while, apart from the sound of wind and rain, the two of them could only hear each other's breathing.

It was then that Huan Tong, having found the bedroom door open and Young Master Hou who should have been sleeping dead to the world on the bed,

missing with the wheelchair still in the room, ran, panicked and agitated, to the door of the study to find the two of them.

Huan Tong breathed out a sigh of relief and asked, “What is Young Master Hou doing at the study? You didn’t even take the wheelchair…”

Lin Qingyu calmed down and said to Lu Wancheng, “You mustn’t catch a chill. I’ll carry you back to the room.”

In Lu Wancheng’s previous life, plotting and killing for his property was something that would never have been possible. He was still immersed in the turbulent emotions of having made a firm resolution, when he heard this

sentence and his emotions instantly became even more turbulent. But the way it was turbulent had changed. He said incredulously, “You’ll carry me…?”

“En.” Lu Wancheng was so sickly that although Lin Qingyu had never trained, because he was still a healthy man, walking a few steps with Lu Wancheng in his arms wouldn’t be much of an effort.

Lin Qingyu grabbed Lu Wancheng’s arm and put it over his shoulders. “Hold tight.”

…and a princess carry?

Lu Wancheng suddenly pulled his hand back. “No, no, no. Cough, I can walk back by myself.”

Lin Qingyu knew at a glance that Lu Wancheng’s useless male ego was rearing its head once again. “By the time you make it back by yourself, the sun would be breaking out of the horizon.”

That evening, when he walked all the way from the bedroom to the study, Lu Wancheng hadn’t felt much of anything. But now he realized that he really didn’t have even a drop of energy left, it was difficult even to just stand up. He was forced to compromise, “Then let Huan Tong carry me back.”

In the bedroom, the doors and windows were closed to keep out the wind and rain. Huan Tong waited upon Lu Wancheng to change out of his rain-soaked

sleepwear. Lu Wancheng lay on the warm and dry bed, his face was still as pale as paper and there was a fishy smell in his mouth.

Hua Lu brewed some ginger tea. With a look of disgust on his face, after Lu Wancheng finished it all off. He had Huan Tong and Hua Lu retreat, leaving only him and Lin Qingyu in the room.

Lin Qingyu had only gone to the study after he had heard Hua Lu say that she had seen the Young Master fast asleep. This being the case, Lu Wancheng must have woken up from his sleep and then heedlessly rushed to the study.

Lin Qingyu sat on the side of the bed and asked, “Did you have a nightmare?”

“You know even this.” Lu Wancheng’s tone returned to his usual relaxed and comfortable tone, “I had a nightmare and was scared to death.”

“What nightmare?”

Lu Wancheng didn’t speak, just looked at him silently, as if confirming that the person in front of him was truly intact and whole. After a while, he smiled and asked, “Ah, just now was I really ugly? Did I cut a sorry figure?”

Lin Qingyu told the truth, “You did cut a sorry figure but you weren’t ugly.” With Lu Wancheng’s temperament, even if his face were to be ruined, he probably won’t ever be that much ugly.

Lu Wancheng said with a “tsk”, “How annoying. I wanted to look cool in front

of you."

Having stayed with Lu Wancheng for a long time, Lin Qingyu had gradually learned to adapt to the unfamiliar words Lu Wancheng would just suddenly spout out of nowhere. He deduced what Lu Wancheng wanted to express according to the context of the speech. The word "cool" must mean something along the lines of being confident and outstanding.

Lin Qingyu said, "I thought you were very cool just now."

Lu Wancheng was startled. He very slowly slipped into his bed, grabbed the quilt and covered his face.

After this night, the ones conspiring to do bad things in the study changed from one person to two.

Know yourself and know your enemy; and you will emerge victorious in every battle. Lin Qingyu's understanding of Xiao Cheng was limited to their two meetings, and his impression of him could be summed up in one word — greasy. Although Lu Wancheng was nominally Xiao Cheng's cousin, he had little contact with him because he was confined to his bed all the year round.

But Lu Wancheng seemed to be very familiar with Xiao Cheng, especially regarding his personal affairs and details.

Lin Qingyu asked Lu Wancheng to list all the things he knew about Xiao Cheng. Lu Wancheng thought back for a long time and said,

“Xiao Cheng’s common facial expressions are ‘lips ticked up with a sneer’, ‘with like a smile that was yet not a smile’, ‘tongue against his cheek’ — it’s as if the gaps between his teeth are stuffed with leeks; when he speaks, he mostly does it ‘slowly and unhurriedly’, ‘remaining calm and composed while handling pressing affairs’. Whenever there is a disagreement, he likes to hold people by their chin and say…” Lu Wancheng lowered his voice deliberately, imitating Xiao Cheng’s tone, “‘Look at Gu ‘.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

“Outside, he is the resolute, ruthless and unfeeling His Royal Highness the Crown Prince; but in front of his beloved, his eyes turn warm, his voice is low and hoarse as he says, ‘kiss me, and I will give you my life and the country’ –

it's so f*ckin' greasy, he could open shop selling grease, the very pinnacle of greasy."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"By the way, he also has a fondness for giving nicknames to people he likes. People obviously have names, but he doesn't use them. Sigh, he amuses himself by calling others 'child', 'little sister', 'little brother'…."

Lin Qingyu interrupted: "Enough. Can't you say something useful?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "I've already said the most useful thing."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while, "Princess Jingchun?"

Lu Wancheng snapped his fingers: "Such quick wits you have! Actually, it's a very cliche story: Xiao Cheng and Jingchun met in the palace when they were young. They were childhood friends, innocent playmates. But she was just a nushi. How could she possibly be qualified to be the prince's wife? So the two could only communicate in secret. Later, the king of the north took a fancy to Jingchun and the Emperor sanctioned their marriage. At that time, Xiao Cheng wasn't yet the crown prince and for the sake of the Emperor, he dared not let out a peep… That is to say, he didn't dare be rash and he could only

watch as Jingchun was married and taken far away. Since then, he could only look for Jingchun lookalikes for comfort."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Since the relationship between the two is a secret then, how did you find out?"

Lu Wancheng said: "Naturally, I have my sources. Just believe me."

"Then how am I like Jingchun?"

"The eyes. There's also a mole under Jingchun's left eye. Many of Xiao Cheng's maids and attendants more or less look like Jingchun."

Lin Qingyu said: "So, as long as I destroy my eyes, Xiao Cheng will lose interest in me?"

"Maybe." Lu Wancheng said, "But you shouldn't do that. I like how your eyes are now."

"Of course not." Lin Qingyu sneered, "Even if I don't care about my face, I don't want to hurt myself for that son of b*tch."

What was the use of dealing a thousand damage to the enemy at the cost of eight hundred to yourself? What he wanted was to remain unscathed as he

watched the other suffer all kinds of torment — to prefer death over living, to beg for mercy in pain.

Xiao Cheng has a deep affection for Princess Jingchun who'd been married off far away… What can they do with this?

The two were lost in thought. Not long after, a maid from the Sleeping Moon Pavilion came to see Lin Qingyu, saying that she had something to report. After Lin Qingyu summoned her in, she said, "Early this morning, the madam took the Second Young Lady out of the house and didn't come back until towards the evening. Yiniang asked me to find the groom and I found out that the Madam and the Second Young Lady had actually gone to the palace and they'd brought with them a lot of generous gifts. Then I went to the manager of the storeroom, and the manager said that Madam hadn't taken anything from the storeroom. In all likelihood, those gifts came from Madam's own dowry."

"I understand." Lin Qingyu said, "Go back and thank Yiniang on my behalf. She was very attentive."

For their visit to the palace this time, Liang Shi and Lu Niantao obviously didn't want to draw attention to themselves. It hasn't been that long ago since the last time the three of them went to the palace together to pay their respects and thank the Empress. Moreover, the Empress had given mother and

daughter the cold shoulder treatment. Were they visiting the palace this time to garner the Empress' favor?

After Lin Qingyu expressed his thoughts, Lu Wancheng said, "It's already been a year or two since Liang Shi's marriage to Nan'an Hou. If she could win the favor of the Empress, she would have already won it, so why did she have to wait until now?"

Lin Qingyu nodded in agreement. "It's not for the Empress, then it must be for someone else."

"In the palace, the Empress is not the only mistress."

For a woman to enter the palace, aside from going to Fengyi Palace, she could also occasionally go to pay her respects to the favored concubine. The two looked at each other and said at the same time, "Chen Guifei."

Lin Qingyu recalled how Liang Shi and Lu Niantao looked at the crown prince in Fengyi Palace that day. Therefore, Liang Shi who'd lost the trust of her husband, lost the stewardship of the mansion, had her son rendered impotent, seeing that life in the Hou Mansion was getting unbearable, decided to look for a backer outside.

The Empress was displeased with her status as the second wife and would not help her. In the harem, apart from the Empress, the most powerful person was the biological mother of the crown prince, Chen Guifei. Nan'an Hou has always been overly cautious in court. He came and went alone and never

participated in any party disputes. If he knew that Liang Shi was privately courting Chen Guifei, he would definitely be furious, so they only dared to go quietly.

The Crown Prince's Eastern Palace, the Empress' Fengyi Palace, Chen Guifei's Changle Palace… and Liang Shi and Lu Niantao.

"Wancheng." Lin Qingyu said slowly, "I want to visit the Lin Residence."

Lu Wancheng said without even having to think about it, "Alright, when?"

"Now."

"You and I will go together."

Just as Lin Qingyu was about to refuse on the grounds that "his condition would make it difficult to go out", he heard Lu Wancheng say, "I was just thinking of asking Father-in-law to help me see how much time I have left."

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment, then nodded.

Lu Wancheng's condition was quickly about to go out of his control. No matter how talented he was, he really no longer knew… what to do.

In the world, there were only two people he knew whose medical skills surpassed his – his teacher and his father. The prescription he used to extend

Lu Wancheng's life was given by his father. Father might have other ways to buy Lu Wancheng more time.

Among the wealthy families, the wife would need to get the approval of the madam if she wished to bring her husband back to her parents' house. Now, apart from Nan'an Hou, Lin Qingyu was the one in charge of the household. He didn't need to tell anyone to go wherever he wished. However, since he wanted to take Lu Wancheng to stay in the Lin Residence for a few days, he would still need to symbolically obtain Nan'an Hou's consent. Saying that he wanted take Lu Wancheng back to the Lin Residence for treatment, Nan'an Hou knowing that Lin Pan Yuan's medical skills were unmatched, naturally, nodded in agreement.

So Lin Qingyu took Lu Wancheng, along with Huan Tong and Hua Lu back to the Lin Residence.

His trip home this time was very sudden, giving his parents and younger brother a great surprise. Lin Qinghe still remembered Lu Wancheng, the big

brother who he'd only met once. With the innocence of a child, he said, "Wancheng Ge, you've lost a lot of weight."

Mother Lin's expression changed slightly. Lu Wancheng smiled while sitting in his wheelchair: "And Xiao Qinghe has grown a lot taller."

Lin Qinghe was so shy that he hid behind his mother. After all, these two were brothers, Lin Qinghe and Lin Qingyu looked quite similar. Looking at him, Lu Wancheng had the pleasure of looking at a small version of Lin Qingyu.

Mother Lin breathed a sigh of relief and said with a smile, "You came back just in time. If you were even a bit late, your father would have already left."

"Left?" Lin Qingyu looked at Father Lin, "Where is father going?"

Father Lin said, "To Yong Liang."

Yong Liang is located to the northwest of Dayu and borders Xixia. Xixia was originally a vassal of Dayu but in recent years, they've grown year by year and were now entertained thoughts of rebelling, or shaking of the Dayu's control and taking its place.

Lin Qingyu asked, "The northwest border is a battlefield, why would Father be going to Yong Liang at this time?"

Father Lin looked grave. "Half a month ago, General Gu was unfortunately struck by a poison arrow on the battlefield. After they removed the arrow, the

residual poison refused to clear from his body. The military doctors and the famous doctors in Yong Liang were helpless in the face of this situation. A report to his Majesty, stated that General Gu was getting weaker and weaker due to the residual poison. I'm afraid that if this situation goes on, his future would be bleak. The Emperor ordered me to leave immediately, to rush to Yong Liang without stopping to diagnose and treat General Gu."

Lu Wancheng was dying himself, and naturally he couldn't bring himself to care about the lives of others. "Yong Liang is so far away from the capital. Even if you were to travel without stopping, it would take at least half a month. Won't it be too late by then?"

Father Lin sighed lightly, "We will have to hope that the Heavens look kindly upon General Gu."

As his son, Lin Qingyu selfishly did not want his father to go to a place of war at this time. However, is not everything under Heaven the Emperor's land? As people of the Dayu, they will have to spend their whole lives, bowing their heads to Imperial power. Moreover, General Gu… was also a person worth saving.

Lin Qingyu said, "Then all I can ask is for Father to be careful and to by all means, take care of yourself."

29

Chapter 28

Father Lin knew that his eldest son must have something important to be bringing his husband home at this time. He took the both of them to the study. Lin Qingyu waved at the servant who served the tea to withdraw then took out a porcelain bottle from his sleeve. He handed it to Father Lin. “Father, do you recognize this fragrance?”

Father Lin uncorked the bottle and gave it a sniff. He said after some consideration, “This fragrance is dignified, heavy and strong. It lingers. It’s almost like the ‘Feng Qiu Huang’ unique to Fengyi Palace.”

Father Lin, as the Pan Yuan of the imperial hospital, although his official position wasn’t high, he was still counted among the Emperor’s inner ministerial circle. He personally looked after the Emperor and the Empress’

health. Every three days, he would go to Fengyi Palace to examine the Empress' pulse, so he was quite familiar with the smell of Feng Qiu Huang.

Lin Qingyu smiled helplessly. "It's only 'almost like'."

Lu Wancheng said, "It turns out that you've been busy trying to recreate the incense used by the Empress… but you've only been in Fengyi Palace for how long? It's already pretty good to be able to recreate it almost perfectly."

Lin Qingyu shook his head. "It's not enough." Incense and medicine have a lot in common. He should have been able to do better.

"You're too demanding on yourself. You can go easier on yourself a bit." Lu Wancheng urged him, "If your demands on yourself are just enough to get by, why then, that'd be no different from living free from all anxieties."

Lin Qingyu coldly swept his eyes away, "Must you really spout your nonsense at me right now?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "Alright, alright, I was wrong. Don't glare at me in front of Father-in-law. You're making me look like I have no status in this household."

Father Lin watched the two of you banter and he understood how Lu Wancheng could still be alive today. When all was said and done, this was the

prescription he gave Lin Qingyu that day in action.

Lin Qingyu didn't feel like bothering with a certain anymore and said, "Father, that incense used in Fengyi Palace, Changle Palace and the Eastern Palace, can you help me get a sample?"

Father Lin has been holding the position of Pan Yuan of the Imperial Hospital for a long time, and has built connections in both the Imperial Medical Office and the Imperial Hospital. He attached great importance to the cultivation of talent and every young imperial doctor who has just arrived at the Imperial Hospital has received his guidance and teaching. Among them, a particularly kind and honest, hardworking and studious newcomer who came from a poor family had been admitted as his student and this young man, he gave his everything to help and teach.

Imperial physicians who didn't have enough qualifications could only treat the eunuchs and maids in the palace. His apprentice, because of his good medical skills and good temperament, was very popular among the maids and eunuchs of the palace. He may be able to get what Lin Qingyu wanted from the maids of the three palaces.

"Maybe I can give it a try." Father Lin said, "But what do you want these things for?"

Father Lin has been cautious and conscientious all his life. If he knew that his eldest son and son-in-law were plotting to kill the crown prince, he wouldn't

be able to accept it. Lin Qingyu also didn't want to involve his family in this, so he just said, "I have my uses for it so Father shouldn't ask."

Father Lin looked worried: "Qingyu, no matter what you want to do, the affairs of the palace aren't things that we can get involved with."

Lin Qingyu smiled: "Father, don't worry. I know not to overstep my bounds."

His 'bounds' were very simple — just Xiao Cheng's life.

Father Lin nodded and turned to Lu Wancheng, "This is such a rare meeting with Young Master Hou. Would you allow me to examine your pulse?"

Lu Wancheng stretched out his arm, presenting his wrist. "Thank you, Father-in-law."

Whenever Father Lin diagnosed his patient, he never let his emotions show on his face. While Lin Qingyu waited patiently, he felt a little nervous and apprehensive for no good reason.

In truth, he knew very well in his heart that given Lu Wancheng's present condition, no matter how superb his father's medical skills were, it was only a matter of more time and less time.

He didn't need to be nervous. No matter what the result, it was all within his

expectations.

Lin Qingyu forced himself to calm down. When his father took his hand back, he calmly asked, “Father, how is he?”

Father Lin looked at Lin Qingyu meaningfully. “Did you change the prescription I gave you?”

“Yes. I replaced the more toxic tiger-wolf medicine with the relatively mild kudzu vine tuber and pseudo-ginseng. The impact shouldn’t have been too big.”

“Kudzu Vine tuber and pseudo-ginseng are good medicines. But if you mix them with the rest of the herbs, I’m afraid…” Father Lin paused for a moment but didn’t go on.

Lu Wancheng cast a resentful look at Lin Qingyu.

Even Father-in-law knew about his impotence. This wasn’t just a little embarrassing.

Fortunately, Father Lin didn’t bother too much about this matter. “This time is different from the past. With Young Master Hou’s current condition, milder

prescriptions can't fill the gaps of his sickness. If you wish to delay it longer, you can only use strong medicine."

Lu Wancheng asked, "What happens if I take the strong medicine?"

Father Lin and Lin Qingyu looked at each other, but neither of them spoke.

Lu Wancheng understood and said with a smile, "Then let's not use that. I'm quite afraid of pain."

There was a knock on the door, and Lin Qinghe's crisp voice came from beyond it. "Papa, Gege, Wancheng Gege, mama says it's time for dinner."

Lin Qingyu opened the door and said, "Qinghe, you push Wancheng Gege to the front hall first."

Lu Wancheng deliberately asked Lin Qinghe, "Can Qinghe push me?"

Lin Qinghe nodded again and again: "I can, I can. I'm very strong."

After the two left, Lin Qingyu asked, "Father, is there really no other way?"

Father Lin sighed and said, "Have Nan'an Hou prepare for the funeral as soon

as possible, no more than two months."

Two months, enough for them to take that dog Xiao Cheng's life.

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and saw found himself saying, "I understand."

Lu Wancheng and the Lin Family had dinner together. Mother Lin was worried about her sickly guest and specially ordered the cook to prepare a lot of light and easy-to-eat dishes. Father Lin was leaving for Yong Liang tomorrow, and this meal was also practice for him.

Lu Wancheng seemed to be in a good mood, with a smile at the corner of his mouth. He even moved his chopsticks frequently. He would only put a little bit onto his plate at a time and it didn't take long for his plate to be half full.

Lin Qingyu knew that Lu Wancheng could hardly eat anything except for rice porridge now. He did this just because he didn't want to spoil their fun.

But obviously this was what spoiled his own fun that most. Otherwise, why would he have no appetite in the face of a bunch of his favorite dishes?

During the meal, Father Lin mentioned about his student in the Imperial Hospital: "I have asked the servant to go to his house to deliver a message,

asking him to come to the house tomorrow. If you have any orders, just let him know."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "Alright."

"Qingyu." Mother Lin called softly, motioning for him to look at Lu Wancheng.

I saw Lu Wancheng sitting in a wheelchair, his head slightly turned to one side, his eyes closed, his expression calm, and his hand… still holding the silver chopsticks.

The Lin Family looked at each other and with tacit understanding, put down their chopsticks as well. Lin Qinghe called out cautiously, "Wancheng Gege?"

Lin Qingyu made a shushing motion and said softly, "He's just asleep."

It was only after being tired out from the carriage trip from the Nan'an Hou Mansion to the Lin Residence, topped off with a long discussion that Lu Wancheng could fall asleep in the middle of the family reunion.

Lin Qingyu beckoned to Huan Tong Hua Lu: "Take Young Master Hou back to

the room to rest."

Huan Tong asked, "Young Master, to which room should we take him?"

Lin Qingyu was taken aback.

Mother Lin said, "Qingyu, your room has been tidied up. Would Young Master Hou be staying in a room with you, or…"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment and said, "Let him stay in the guest room."

In the Hou Mansion, there was a reason why he wronged himself by sleeping on a luohan in the same room as Lu Wancheng. Now that they were back at his home, they naturally didn't need to sleep together anymore.

As for the reason why he was willing to sleep in the same room with Lu Wancheng, at first, it was to shut Liang Shi's mouth, and then… it was probably because he got used to it and was too lazy to move out.

He had unexpectedly maintained such a bad habit for more than a year.

Lin Qingyu had Huan Tong and Hua Lu watch over Lu Wancheng in the guest room, while he rested in his bedroom. Since he could remember, he had slept

in this bedroom — until he put on his wedding robes and married into the Hou Mansion.

The room was clean and spotless, and the furnishings were exactly the same as he remembered. But he kept feeling that something was wrong. If there was a screen with mandarin ducks playing in the water between the bed and the luohan,…

Lin Qingyu stopped himself from thinking about it any longer. He blew out the candle and fell asleep by himself.

Early the next morning, Father Lin bid farewell to his wife and children and set off for his trip to Yong Liang escorted by several of the Gu Family's guards. No one went to wake Lu Wancheng up, but Lu Wancheng woke up by himself, even earlier than Lin Qingyu. He paid his respects to Father Lin alone and then together with the Lin family, saw Father Lin off to the carriage.

Lin Qingyu asked, "Why did you wake up so early today?"

"I think it was because I slept early yesterday." Lu Wancheng said leisurely, "Isn't it good to wake up a bit early? To saves you from complaining about how I sleep too much."

Lin Qingyu paused and said, "I don't mind it now. Sleep as long as you like."

Lu Wancheng squinted his eyes, looking at the first rays of the morning run that he hadn't seen for a long time. He said, "There will be time to sleep in the

future. It's alright to sleep less now."

Lin Qingyu stood beside the wheelchair, watching the sunrise with him for a while. He said, "Let's go in."

Lin Qinghe had long reached the age for schooling and he had to go to school on weekdays. Mother Lin thought that it since Lin Qingyu so rarely came back, she should give her youngest son a few days off so that the two brothers could spend time together. Who could have guessed that Lin Qinghe wouldn't be any less relaxed with his brother than in school. He recited his lessons and wrote his words, not a single thing was missed.

Lu Wancheng looked at the two, one big and one small, hard at work. And so, he too took a pen and scribbled on the paper, feeling very bored. After Lin Qingyu listened to Lin Qinghe's recitations, he looked up at Lu Wancheng, and saw Lu him yawning, holding a pen in his hand. After meeting his gaze, he

turned and stopped, and then sneakily took out the buyao from inside his clothes, skillfully twirling it around.

Lin Qinghe was attracted by the novelty. He pulled Lin Qinghe's sleeve and said, "Brother, I want to learn how to do that."

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "No, you're not allowed."

Lin Qinghe looked very disappointed. Lu Wancheng winked at him. "It's okay, I'll teach you secretly later."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Not long after, Mother Lin ordered her momo to deliver to them a message, saying that she had made a few snacks and she asked the three young masters

to have some before they continue to work hard. Lin Qinghe asked eagerly, “Gege, can I have a break?”

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. “Go.”

Lin Qinghe happily took the momo’s hand and left. Lu Wancheng asked, “Aren’t you going to eat?”

Lin Qingyu looked down at the words Lin Qinghe had just written, and said, “I’m not hungry.”

Lu Wancheng looked at him for a while, and said, “Qingyu, do I have to sleep in the guest room tonight?”

Lin Qingyu’s heart moved and he asked, “You didn’t sleep well in the guest room?”

Lu Wancheng said slowly, “No, it’s not that.” He was about to say something more when he heard Huan Tong reporting from outside, “Young Master, Imperial Physician Hu is here.”

Hu Ji, the imperial physician, was the disciple that Father Lin mentioned.

“Ask him to go to the front hall and wait for a while.” Proper business was important but Lin Qingyu didn’t forgot that it was about the time for Lu

Wancheng to drink his medicine, “Huan Tong, take Young Master Hou back to his room to drink his medicine.”

Lu Wancheng looked at Lin Qingyu’s rapidly receding back, a complicated expression on his face. Huan Tong walked up to him and said, “Young Master Hou, let me push you back to your room.”

Lu Wancheng was silent for a long time. Suddenly, he smiled and whispered, “Huan Tong, what should I do if I’m a little depressed.”

Huan Tong said, puzzled: “Why is Young Master Hou depressed?”

Lu Wancheng thought about it for a while and said, not quite sure, “It seems because… I’m the only one who isn’t used to it.”

30

Chapter 29

Lin Qingyu met his father's disciple, Hu Ji, in the front hall of the Lin Residence. Hu Ji came from a poor family. When he was studying in the Imperial Medical Office, he could only afford to eat one meal a day. Once, when Father Lin had gone to the Imperial Medical Office to give a lecture, he ran across him hiding in a corner desperately gulping down water to stop his hunger. Having pity on him, Father Lin found him a job cleaning the library. With this little money, Hu Ji was able to complete his studies. Afterwards, he entered the Imperial Hospital, and was taken in by Father Lin as his student ad shown great care. To him, Father Lin was tantamount to a second parent. And so, no matter how difficult the task assigned to him by Father Lin, to him it would be an un-shirkable duty.

After exchanging greetings, Hu Ji took out two incense boxes from the medical box. "The red spices are the 'Feng Qiu Huang' used by the Empress; the brown

spices are the 'Sheng Chazi' used by Concubine Chen. As for His Royal Highness, the Crown Prince, he is not in the habit of using incense."

Lin Qingyu took the incense boxes and smelled them one after the other, "Doctor Hu, have you done any study on spices?"

Hu Ji said modestly, "I know a little bit."

"What is your opinion on these two spices?"

The items used by the nobles in the palace are naturally unparalleled. Feng Qiu Huang can help one concentrate energy and calm the mind. It promotes health and soothes the nerves. Sheng Chazi has the effect of helping one reach enlightenment and stabilizes the blood. Both incenses are palace secret formulations. Without the Emperor's explicit permission, no one is allowed to use it." Hu Ji said, with a hint of lingering fear in his eyes, "Yunxiu Guniang from Fengyi Palace and Xiao Kuanzi from Changle Palace took great risks to steal these samples. I hope they may be of use to Young Master Lin."

Lin Qingyu pondered for a moment, then asked, "Why doesn't the Crown Prince use incense?"

Hu Ji said: "The Crown Prince experienced the battle for succession and witnessed the death of the third prince due to poisoning. And so, he's very careful about what he eats. According to the maids of the Shang Shi Bureau, all

meals in the Eastern Palace are prepared by the kitchen of the Eastern Palace. It never passes through anyone else's hands."

"I see." Lin Qingyu said, "Thank you, Doctor Hu, for your hard work."

Hu Ji said immediately, "Young Master Lin is very polite. The Pan Yuan had provided me with the chance to rebuild. It is an honor to be able to share Master's worries."

Father Lin has helped and rescued far more than just one or two people. Lin Qingyu himself also wondered how his parents, ever so kind-hearted, could give birth to a "wicked person" like him.

Lin Qingyu found Lu Wancheng in the guest room and showed him the two boxes of spices that Hu Ji brought. Lu Wancheng asked, "Is there any problem with these two incenses?"

"No. But in pharmacology, good medicine and good medicine can result in something highly toxic when mixed together. I think the same holds true for spices."

Xiao Cheng wasn't like Lu Qiaosong. As Hu Ji said, everything sent to the Eastern Palace must be strictly investigated. The livening-up medicine he'd used last time wouldn't be able to enter the Eastern Palace. The only way was to send in something seemingly harmless, have it react with the things that

Xiao Cheng often comes into contact with, allow it produce a poison that would quietly eat away at Xiao Cheng's body bit by bit.

Lu Wancheng couldn't help sighing when he heard these words. "Study well the sciences and you can travel fearlessly to any corner of the world. This is a truth since time imemorial."

"Truth is useless." Lin Qingyu pressed down his lightly on the space between his brows, "Xiao Cheng doesn't use incense. Even if he does, what we send won't make it into the Eastern Palace."

Lu Wancheng played with the Buyao that Lin Qingyu had given him. He said, "If you can't send things in, can you send people in?"

The tacit understanding had gradually become stronger and Lin Qingyu almost immediately understood what Lu Wancheng meant, "We'll still need an opportunity for this matter."

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "I'll look for the opportunity, and you find the catalyst for the reaction. When bro-… Husband and wife are of the same mind, they're a blade sharp enough to even sever gold."

Lin Qingyu's lips ticked up slightly. "Okay—that's right," he remembered something, and beckoned to Huan Tong, "Remove the luohan in my room and

replace it with a small bed."

Lu Wancheng was taken aback. "Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu delivered the reason that he had thought of in advance, "Given your current condition, a mishap may happen at any time. You can't be left without someone watching you. Hua Lu is a girl and propriety limits her. While Huan Tong is not meticulous enough in his work. After thinking about it, it is still better to keep you by my side. "

Huan Tong said in disbelief, "Young Master?"

A smile slowly appeared on Lu Wancheng's face. Looking at Lin Qingyu, his eyes appeared as pools reflecting a spring scenery. "Then when we return to the Hou Mansion, we will also replace the luohan with a bed. Or, we'll have the carpenter make a new bed." Lu Wancheng gestured up and down, "We'll have him make a bunk bunk. I'll sleep in the bottom bunk, you sleep in the top bunk…"

Lin Qingyu imagined the scene for a moment, a complicated expression on his face.

Huan Tong couldn't help muttering in his heart: "Young Master Hou is really promising.

Lin Qingyu plunged headlong into studying the incenses. His body was dyed with all sorts of fragrances every day. Formulating incenses was a whole

different study. Although he has a foundation in pharmacology, it wasn't easy to understand its subtleties in a short period of time.

The two stayed in the Lin Residence for a few days during which news from the palace that the Emperor intended to choose a concubine for the crown prince.

It was said that it was Wen Guogong who first brought up the matter. Wen Guogong believed that the Crown Prince having already reached the age of weak crown, had long been old enough to marry a wife and take on a concubine. Three years ago, the Empress Dowager passed away, and the Crown Prince had just entered the Eastern Palace, the matter of his marriage was delayed due to filial piety. Now that the period for filial piety has passed, it was time to turn their thoughts once again to his marriage. The wife of the crown prince was to be the future Empress, so in this matter they should be cautious and not act too hastily. However, they could choose one or two concubines for the crown prince in the meanwhile to take care of the internal affairs of the Eastern Palace, so as to share the worries of the crown prince. The Emperor pondered this matter deepy and gave the Empress full authority to select the concubine.

Although she is only a concubine, she would still be the crown prince's first concubine, giving her great status. In the future, she would at least be a guifei. Naturally, they couldn't simply just choose anyone. Her character, appearance and family background must all be carefully considered. After some deliberation, the Empress drew up a roster for the Emperor to look over.

Among them, there was included the name of Lu Niantao, the daughter of Nan'an Hou.

The noble ladies on the roster each have their own merits. In the end, they were to be the crown prince's concubine so the Emperor meant to let the prince choose himself.

Lu Niantao felt hope mixed with fear when the news spread to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion. The happy thing was that if she capture the eyes of the crown prince, the hard times for her and her mother would come to an end. Her worry though, was that she had already once crossed paths with the crown prince in Fengyi Palace, and the crown prince hadn't even spared her a glance. All his attention had been on Lin Qingyu. Wanting to stand out from the all the other noble ladies was easier said than done.

Fortunately, they were prepared in advance, and the gift they secretly sent to Changle Palace came in handy. Chen Guifei's eunuch aide delivered news that the Emperor had caught a cold during the hunting trip and had yet to recover, his condition sometimes good, sometimes bad. The crown prince personally

copied the Buddhist scriptures 300 times to show his filial piety and was planning to send it to Changsheng Temple to burn and pray for blessings.

This news, Xiao Kuanzi of Changle Palace also told Hu Ji and Hu Ji in turn, told Lin Qingyu. Once Lu Wancheng learned about it, he immediately said two words, “Personal connections.”

In late autumn, worshippers were teeming in Changsheng Temple, there was also a sense of coldness and bleakness. The wild geese were flying south, the days were getting cold and dismal, grasses turned brown and leaves began to fall.

Lin Qingyu helped Lu Wancheng out of the carriage, and Huan Tong pushed the wheelchair over. A little monk walked towards them. Clasping his hands together in salute, he said, “Young Master Hou, Lin Shaojun, thank you for coming all this way.”

He sounded as though he had been waiting for a long time.

Lin Qingyu said, “Did Little Teacher know that we were coming?”

The little monk said with a smile, “Lin Shaojun overestimates this little monk. It was the National Teacher who told this humble monk that there were to be

distinguished guests at the Changsheng Temple today. And so, he had me wait in front of the temple."

Lu Wancheng and Lin Qingyu looked at each other and said, "Little Teacher, are you sure that we are the 'guests' mentioned by the National Teacher?"

The little monk gestured for them to proceed inside. He smiled but said nothing.

The three followed the little monk through the main hall and all the way to the back mountains. The little monk said, "Speaking of which, Madame Hou and the Second Young Lady Lu also arrived at the temple today. They should

currently be reciting scriptures and praying to the Buddha in the family hall. Would Lin Shaojun like to greet them?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "It seems that Young Master Hou is the only one invited by the National Teacher."

The little monk bowed. "I ask that Lin Shaojun not blame this humble monk."

Their reason for coming this time was for Xiao Cheng and Lu Niantao's autumn wind dewdrops. Lin Qingyu didn't want to disrupt the plan because of this National Teacher's sudden appearance. "Wancheng?"

Lu Wancheng said, "Go ahead, I'll go see what this Half-immortal Xu is up to."

After separating from Lin Qingyu, the little monk brought Lu Wancheng and Huan Tong to the door of one of the monks' quarters. "Young Master Hou, please. Patron Huan Tong, may wait at the door with me."

Sandalwood incense was lit in the room and the smoke rose in spirals. The Dayu's National Teacher, Xu Junyuan stood with his hands behind his back. He had about him the aura of a transcendent being.

"Young Master Hou," Xu Junyuan turned around and looked at him with an elegant smile, "Long time no see, I trust that you have been well since we last met."

"You trust that I've been well…" Lu Wancheng laughed, "Does the National

Teacher think I look well?"

"Young Master Hou has indeed lost a lot of weight compared to Qingming last April."

"So, I ask that the National Teacher please get to the point. The time of one who is terminally ill is extremely precious and I don't want to waste it on meaningless things."

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "Young Master Hou's frame of mind seems to have changed a lot. The last time I saw the Young Master Hou, what I saw was a person who had transcended life and death, someone who wouldn't mind spending some time to talk with me."

Because he now had someone and somethinkg he cared about, time had also become meaningful. At very least, he couldn't die before Xiao Cheng.

Lu Wancheng smiled. "Then I shall be taking my leave."

Xu Junyuan immediately said, "Lu Wancheng's fate – this name, this Eight Characters, no matter how many times I calculate it, the result say that his life

will end in the twelfth lunar month of this year." He shook his head and sighed, "It is a pity."

Lu Wancheng looked at Xu Junyuan for a long time, as though he wanted to see through him: "It's written in the book, that National Teacher Xu possess some real ability and learning."

"Oh?" Xu Junyuan raised his eyebrows slightly, "Dare I ask Young Master Hou, what you are talking about?"

Lu Wancheng didn't answer. He pushed the wheelchair to the desk, took a pen and wrote ten characters on the paper. "Then, let me ask the National Teacher to help me calculate again."

After half an hour, Xu Junyuan personally pushed Lu Wancheng to the back wing and sent him back to Lin Qingyu. Just as he was about to withdraw, Lu

Wancheng stopped him and asked, “Regarding the things National Teacher has said just now, how certain are these things?”

Xu Junyuan said ambiguously, “If the will of Heaven doesn’t change, then it’s a hundred percent. If the will of Heaven wishes to change, then what can I do?”

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, “As expected of the national teacher, you words bring more enlightenment than endless days of study.”

Xu Junyuan left with a smile. Lin Qingyu asked, “What did he tell you?”

Lu Wancheng hesitated for a while and said, “We’ll talk about this later. What about Liang Shi and Lu Niantao?”

“They…”

Lu Wancheng saw someone approaching from a distance, and abruptly interrupted Lin Qingyu, “Qingyu, you must hate Xiao Cheng a lot, don’t you?”

Lin Qingyu gave him a strange look. “Is there a reason you’re asking?”

Lu Wancheng smiled a little shyly. “Then if you had to be kissed by a man, would you rather be kissed by Xiao Cheng or by me?”

Just hearing the words “by Xiao Cheng” made nausea rise in Lin Qingyu’s stomach and he looked at Lu Wancheng as though he found him offensive. But

thinking that Lu Wancheng didn't have long to live, he tried his best to put away his bad temper and said as calmly as possible, "I choose neither."

"Sigh, just choose one," Lu Wancheng won't give up, "It's only 'if'."

Lin Qingyu didn't know what was so important about this question, why Lu Wancheng was so insistent on having him say "I choose you".

"I'd rather die."

Lu Wancheng whispered, "Qingyu…"

"Fine, fine. I choose you." Lin Qingyu reluctantly said, "Can you stop it?"

Lu Wancheng didn't know where the strength came from, but he stood up from the wheelchair and said with a smile, "Remember what you said."

As soon as he finished speaking, Lin Qingyu felt a tightness around his waist. Lu Wancheng had unexpectedly wrapped his arms around his wait. The familiar medicinal incense mixed with sandalwood penetrated into his nose.

Before he could react, he saw Lu Wancheng bowing his head, leaning in close to him.

Lin Qingyu snapped back to his senses. He put his hands against the other's chest, trying to push the person away. But if he really did push him, Lu Wancheng might really just die.

At this moment, Lu Wancheng whispered in his ear, "Someone's watching."

Someone?

Lin Qingyu understood, the strength behind his hands gradually weakened and finally he changed what was to be a push into a hug. He closed his eyes while clinging to Lu Wancheng's shoulders with both hands.

Long eyelashes swept across the tip of Lu Wancheng's nose. Itchy; his lips barely brushed against Lin Qingyu's cheek.

It was just a borrowed kiss.

He didn't know how long it took but he eventually felt Lu Wancheng straighten up. Lin Qingyu slowly opened his eyes, his long eyelashes couldn't

hide the look of loss and unease in his eyes. Seeing it, Lu Wancheng breathing stuck.

Lin Qingyu calmed down and asked in a low voice, “Is it him?”

“Qingyu,” Lu Wancheng said slowly, “There seems to be something a little wrong.”

“What?”

“My heart is beating so fast, I’m almost out of breath…”

Lu Wancheng was already shaky, Lin Qingyu instinctively stretched out his hand and pulled him into his arms. “Wancheng?”

The two almost fell together. Fortunately, Lin Qingyu steadied the both of them with his knees on the ground.

Lu Wancheng’s face was pale, but his ears were strangely red. He knew that he was about to faint but he had something he needed to say before he lost consciousness.

Lu Wancheng grabbed Lin Qingyu’s robes and desperately spit out a few words, “Do not princess-carry me…” After speaking, he tilted his head and

promptly fainted in Lin Qingyu's arms.

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Huan Tong had come looking for the two young masters. Seeing this scene, he thought that the Young Master Hou was ill for the umpteenth time. With fire burning his eyebrows, he said, "Young Master, what happened to the Young Master Hou?!"

After Lin Qingyu checked Lu Wancheng's pulse, he didn't know what expression to show for a while. "He was too weak to bear the excitement, so he temporarily lost consciousness. It's not a big problem, let's just wait for him to recover."

Huan Tong hit the truth on the head. "But with the Young Master Hou's temperament, what could have possibly gotten so unbearably excited?"

Lin Qingyu's cheeks slightly warmed. He forced himself to calm down and said, "Who knows with him? Carry him into the room to rest."

When Huan Tong left with Lu Wancheng on his back, Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Since Your Highness is here, why hide in the dark?"

31

Chapter 30

“Ah, Young Master Hou and Lin Shaojun have certainly given me a good show.” His voice came first before he could be seen.

The one who came had long eyebrows reaching to his temples, his eyes were long and narrow, his thin lips appeared coquettish. He was obviously of a handsome and dashing appearance, but when coupled with the look on his face that seemed to say, ‘I know I’m handsome’, it immediately became something hard to describe. Lin Qingyu had only glanced at him and he had already had the urge to throw him into ice water to get rid of the grease.

Lin Qingyu bowed in salute. “Greetings to His Royal Highness.”

“Since were are outside the palace, there is no need for Lin Shaojun to be so polite to me.” When he spoke, Xiao Cheng never took his eyes off Lin Qingyu’s face. “Raise your head and look at me.”

Lin Qingyu concealed the coldness in his eyes and raised his eyes, meeting Xiao Cheng’s gaze. Xiao Cheng stared deeply into his eyes, a trace of

reminiscence and nostalgia in his eyes. He murmured, “It’s been a long time since I have seen these eyes.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Your Highness is speaking of Princess Jingchun’s eyes?”

Xiao Cheng startled as though waking from a dream. The emotions in his eyes receded like a tide and he said coldly, “Did Lu Wancheng tell you? How did he…”

“It seems that Young Master Hou was right. His Highness is indeed unable to forget about his old feelings for Princess Jingchun. The reason why he admires me is also because I somewhat resemble Jingchun.”

Xiao Chen narrowed his eyes and said, ridicule evident in his voice, “I didn’t expect that a long-bedridden sickly seedling like Lu Wancheng would know so much about it. Unfortunately, when all is said and done, he is dying and even a

mere kiss can make him faint." Xiao Cheng licked the corner of his lips. "It truly is a waste for such stunner as Lin Shaojun to be following him."

A stunner, meaning a beauty. It could be regarded as a kind of compliment. But when it came out from Xiao Cheng's mouth, it only made him want to cut his tongue out and serve it with wine.

"A stunner?" Lin Qingyu laughed, "If I didn't have these eyes and this tear-shaped mole, would Your Highness still think I'm a stunner?"

"Why should Lin Shaojun belittle himself so? Lin Shaojun's appearance is exceptional in the entire world. Even without Jingchun, you have beauty enough to make people fall in love at first sight." Xiao Cheng approached Lin

Qingyu. He was tall and could completely shroud Lin Qingyu under his own figure, “Little Qingyu, why didn’t you drink the wine I gave you last time, hm?”

Lin Qingyu tried his best to hide his surging malice. He took a half step back, and said, “I’m already married. Surely, it must be inappropriate for His Highness to be seducing me like this.”

“Seduce?” Xiao Cheng approached Lin Qingyu, his voice hoarse, “Then, did I get you excited?”

More like it made my desire to poison and kill you so much stronger.

Can this dog thing get out of his sight?

Xiao Chen smelled the faint scent on Lin Qingyu’s body. He pressed the tip of his tongue to the inside of his cheek and said, “You smell so good…”

Lin Qingyu didn’t want to stay for a moment longer. “The marriage between me and Young Master Hou was brokered by the Empress and bestowed by the

Emperor himself. Your Highness is so disrespectful, do you mean to hit the Emperor and the Empress' faces?"

Xiao Cheng looked at him and his lips hooked up in a smile, he said, "It doesn't matter. Lu Wancheng won't live for long. I can be patient."

"Then, I shall now leave to take care of my husband," Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "I shall not be accompanying you any longer."

"Little Qingyu," Xiao Chen stopped him, one side of his lips raised up. With that half-smile, he said, "There will come a day, when I will have you lie willingly under me – I will be waiting for you."

Lin Qingyu turned around and walked through the corridor. He saw a plain white skirt disappearing around the corner. He looked back at the smug Xiao Cheng, he whispered to himself, "Don't wait for me, wait for death."

A monk of the Changsheng Temple who was good at the traditional medical arts gave an acupuncture treatment to Lu Wancheng who had fainted. When Lin Qingyu found Lu Wancheng in one of the side rooms, he had already woken up and was taking sips of a soothing decoction. Huan Tong stood to

one side, looking after Lu Wancheng. When he saw Lin Qingyu walking in, he said, “Young Master is here.”

Lu Wancheng froze in the middle of drinking the medicine. He then smiled and said, “Qingyu.” It was as if nothing had happened.

As long as he wasn’t embarrassed, it would be others who would be embarrassed.

Lin Qingyu said slowly, “You just…”

F*ck, it was still embarrassing.

Lu Wancheng covered his face with his hands, unable to defend himself. “It’s not that I’m frustrated, it’s that this body is too weak.” He could admit that he

seeing the other up close just now had sent his heart racing a bit and it got to his head, but it wasn't to the point that he'd pass out.

Lu Wancheng was indignant and depressed, "If it were the me before, I could run 800 meters while carrying you and I wouldn't even be out of breath."

Lin Qingyu quietly watched him bragging.

Lu Wancheng seemed hurt by his expression so, he lowered his head and said dejectedly, "It's true. Qingyu, you've got to believe me."

In consideration for the patient's mood, Lin Qingyu dutifully said, "I believe you."

Lu Wancheng was doubtful, "Really?"

"En."

Lu Wancheng smiled. The young man's smile was clear and relaxed, like the sky after the summer rainstorm. It saved Lin Qingyu's eyes from being covered in grease.

After regaining his self-esteem, Lu Wancheng turned back to proper business.

“By the way, did you see Xiao Cheng?”

“I saw him,” Lin Qingyu sneered, “He called me-‘Little Qingyu’.”

Lu Wancheng: “…Save me.”

Once Lu Wancheng had rested, Lin Qingyu asked Huan Tong to pack up and prepare to return to the Hou Mansion. The three came to the front hall, and Huan Tong saw the monk who had just given Lu Wancheng the acupuncture treatment. He said, “Young Master, that was the master who gave Young Master Hou acupuncture to wake him up.”

The master met their gazes and nodded. Lin Qingyu thought that as Lu Wancheng’s nominal wife, it was necessary to thank the master in person, so he asked Huan Tong and Lu Wancheng to wait for a while.

Lin Qingyu had heard earlier that the Buddhist doctors had their own set of medical methods comparable to those of ordinary doctors. After thanking

him, the master took the initiative to ask about Lu Wancheng's body and Lin Qingyu told him a bit about it.

Huan Tong grew bored of waiting. Watching the pilgrims burn incense and kneel to pray for blessings, he said, "Young Master Hou, why don't we also burn some incense sticks for the Buddha?"

Lu Wancheng said indifferently, "Alright."

So Huan Tong asked the monk for six incense sticks. After lighting them, he gave half to Lu Wancheng. He copied the pilgrims and knelt on the cushion, holding the incense with both hands. He mumbled out some words and after that, he kowtowed three times to the Buddha statue. He then inserted the incense into the incense burner. After doing this, Huan Tong patted his clothes and stood up. Seeing the Young Master Hou holding the incense sticks carelessly, looking in the direction of the young master and the monk. He

knelt once again. “It isn’t convenient for the Young Master Hou to do this, so I will do it for him and pay respects to the Buddha on his behalf.”

After kowtowing, Huan Tong said, “Young Master Hou, you can express your wish to the Buddha.”

Lu Wancheng looked back. “Wish?”

“Yes. As long as the Buddha hears it, he will definitely help us achieve our wish.”

Lu Wancheng, sitting in his wheelchair, looked at the golden Buddha statue above the hall. A solemn treasure, looking down at all beings.

Lu Wancheng thought about it for a while, and said with a low smile, “Then… I hope he will always be happy.”

At the entrance of the Nan’an Hou Mansion, just as Lin Qingyu’s carriage arrived, Liang Shi and Lu Niantao’s carriage arrived as well. When Liang Shi got out of the carriage, she saw Lin Qingyu. She instinctively wanted to hide

but was pulled by Lu Niantao to a stop. “Mother is the mistress, he is the Shaojun. Courtesy must still be adhered to.”

Liang Shi clenched her fingers tightly and put a smile on her face. “Wancheng, Qingyu, where did you go? Why didn’t you tell your mother?”

Lu Wancheng’s face was sinking like water, and he said angrily, “I would rather have not gone out.”

Lin Qingyu pursed his lips and reached out to push the wheelchair. He then heard Lu Wancheng say, “Huan Tong, push me back.”

Huan Tong said “Oh”, completely confused. He looked at Lu Wancheng, then at Lin Qingyu. He then pushed Lu Wancheng away. Lin Qingyu was quiet for a while before following after them.

The other servants also looked at each other in dismay. Everyone in the whole mansion knew that the eldest young master had the best temperament of

everyone there. This was the first time they've seen the eldest young master treat the Shaojun so coldly.

Liang Shi didn't understand. "Haven't they always had a good relationship? What's wrong?"

"It's because they have a good relationship that he's like this." Lu Niantao explained, "No matter how of no use Eldest Brother is, he is still a man. How could he bear having his wife coveted by others? Even if that person is…"

Lu Niantao was both gloating and suffering from subtle jealousy. What was the use of such a face on a man? If she could also have that face, what need would be there for her to scheme so much?

That night, Lu Wancheng and Lin Qingyu had a big quarrel, throwing the Blue Wind Pavilion into chaos. The servants from other courtyards, passing by the

gate of the Blue Wind Pavilion, could hear the sound of things being thrown to the ground.

Lu Wancheng pointed at Lin Qingyu, gritted his teeth and said, “Let me ask you, did you make an appointment with him for a private meeting at Changsheng Temple today?!”

Lin Qingyu reasoned with him, “If I’d made an appointment with him in advance, why would I have taken you there?”

“Do you think I’ve gone stupid from sickness?”

“Yes.”

“You have never used perfume before. Why did you wear that sachet when you went to Changsheng Temple today?”

“I wore it casually. I didn’t expect him to like it.”

Lu Wancheng said deliberately ambiguous, “Oh, you must want to see me die

sooner so you can choose someone higher up."

Lin Qingyu said calmly: "If you want to think so then I can't help it."

Lu Wancheng choked. "You…"

Lin Qingyu waited for Lu Wancheng to say something back.

Lu Wancheng lowered his voice, "You can't say that."

"Why?"

"If you say that, I can't come up with a comeback."

"Then stop arguing." Lin Qingyu said and with a wave of his arm, all the things on the table were swept to the ground.

Lu Wancheng smiled. He picked up a vase on the shelf and was about to throw it to the ground when he heard Lin Qingyu say, "That's a relic from the previous dynasty."

Lu Wancheng immediately put the vase back. "Then that's your inheritance."

After one night, the house was a mess. Hua Lu and a few of the maids spent a long time cleaning up. They then took out the rubbish that was cleaned up and

discarded them. Among them was the sachet that caught Xiao Cheng's attention.

It was before the early winter and the chrysanthemums were in bloom. The Blue Wind Pavilion was already using the charcoal braziers and they had hung up the door curtains to keep out the wind.

Lin Qingyu was in the study, reading the letter sent by Zhang Shiquan from Xuzhou. His eyes gradually turning cold. In the end, he wrote back a letter, only three words were written in it: continue to investigate.

"Young Master," Huan Tong rushed in, "Young Master, Young Master Hou is asking you to return to the bedroom. He said he wanted to show you something good."

Lin Qingyu asked suspiciously, "What something good?"

Huan Tong smiled happily. "You'll know when you go and have a look."

Lin Qingyu walked into the bedroom. He saw that luohan he slept on was gone. The screen and Lu Wancheng's bed were also gone, replaced by two beds on top of each other. It was the bunk beds that Lu Wancheng had mentioned.

Lu Wancheng was talking to the carpenter, "Add a fence to the upper bunk to prevent the Shaojun from turning over in the middle of the night and falling

off."

The carpenter said, "Young Master Hou is very considerate. I'll add it here."

Lin Qingyu: "…" In the end, he couldn't escape this disaster.

"Qingyu's here." Lu Wancheng deliberately stepped aside to give Lin Qingyu an unobstructed view of his and the carpenter's masterpiece. "How is it? Look at this staircase, I specially had the carpenter make it wide to make it easier for you to get in and out of bed."

Lin Qingyu opened his mouth to speak. Seeing Lu Wancheng's heavy coat and his sleeves that were now so much larger than his wrists, he compromised, "As long as you like it."

The bed that Lu Wancheng asked the carpenter to make was cumbersome to get up to and down from, but it was still comfortable to sleep in. Not long after

Lin Qingyu fell asleep, he heard someone calling his name in his ear while he was half asleep.

Lin Qingyu opened his eyes. It was still dark outside. Lu Wancheng stood by the bed, holding onto the added fence with both hands, he looked at him with a smile.

The sleepiness had yet to subside, Lin Qingyu's voice was a little warmer and softer than usual, "What time is it?"

Lu Wancheng said, "It's just past zishi."

Lin Qingyu thought that Lu Wancheng woke him up in the middle of the night because he felt unwell. But seeing him standing up on his own and speaking so steadily, this possibility could be ruled out.

Lin Qingyu was under a rare bout of laziness and didn't sit up. He turned over and lay on his side to meet Lu Wancheng's eyes. "What are you doing waking me up at this hour?"

In the dark night, Lu Wancheng's eyes shone like stars, "Qingyu, I'm eighteen today."

32

Chapter 31

Lin Qingyu couldn't react for a while. Lu Wancheng is eighteen today?

According to Lu Wancheng's Eight Characters, he was already long past eighteen. He was actually approaching the age of weak crown. This eighteen-year-old wasn't Lu Wancheng. It could only be – Him.

It was only a birthday and it wasn't multiple-of-ten birthday. If this was his own birthday, Lin Qingyu wouldn't have cared about it, much less waited specially and woken up someone in the middle of the night for it. If this was before, he would have driven him back to the bottom bunk, turned around and continued to sleep. But Lu Wancheng's eyes were so clear and bright, as though he'd been looking forward to it for a long time, just to share this little secret with him at this moment.

Lin Qingyu sat up. He swept his long messy hair past his shoulders and walked down the steps to get out of bed. He could hardly make out anything in the dark and his clothes brushed against the ground. Going down the stairs, it was all too easy to carelessly make a misstep. Lin Qingyu really couldn't

understand how he had been convinced into accepting this bunk bed that was so far out of this world.

“Be careful.”

A hand stretched out, thin and fragile like broken cold jade. Lin Qingyu also stretched out his hand, but he didn’t dare to borrow any strength from it. He placed his hand ever so lightly on Lu Wancheng’s palm.

Lu Wancheng’s cold extremities were an old problem. Lin Qingyu didn’t possess any sort of yang-heavy physique, but his hands were still much warmer than his. Lu Wancheng felt the warmth and softness in his palm, and before he had time to react, Lin Qingyu had already landed safely and released his hand.

Was this considered hand-holding? Held, but not completely held?

Lu Wancheng let out a couple of muffled coughs. Feeling exhausted, he had to sit back on the bed. He said with a smile, “I wasn’t planning on waking you up

either. But eighteen is very important to me, I… I wanted to share this moment with you."

Lin Qingyu used a firestick to light the candle. He asked, "What's so important about being eighteen?"

"In my hometown, there are a lot of things boys can do once they turn eighteen, and the same goes for girls."

"For example?"

"For example, you can play until late at night, you can stay outside by yourself, and you can…" Lu Wancheng stopped, his eyes lingering on Lin Qingyu's lips. As if he was a little embarrassed, "I've been looking forward to this day since I was a child. After I got here, I've been counting the days in my heart."

Regarding Lu Wancheng's true identity, the two have always had a tacit understanding. If Lu Wancheng didn't bring it up, Lin Qingyu never took the initiative to ask. However, he was still able to piece together the image of this other person from Lu Wancheng's occasional words.

He didn't know how the boy turned into Lu Wancheng. He didn't want to believe in the supernatural, but he believed in his own gut feelings.

The boy was probably a smart and lazy teenager, in good health but always lacking sleep. He certainly wouldn't have been someone who worked hard in the school: while the teacher lectured on top of the podium, he slept soundly

off it. Yet, despite this, he could still win the top spot for all their assessments. He must have very good looks and has unwittingly captured the hearts of many of his classmates. The snacks he received from his admirers, he shared with his friends. It was a pity that he was too lazy to even respond to other people's good impression, so much so that he has never even held a girl's hand.

And today was the boy's eighteenth birthday.

"In this way, in your hometown, the eighteenth birthday is more important than our twentieth birthday."

"Yes, I was just over seventeen when I came here. I thought I wouldn't live to be eighteen. I didn't expect it to be delayed until now."

Lin Qingyu asked knowingly, "Oh, and to whose credit could it have been that you've been able to persist to your eighteenth birthday?"

"Of course it's to our Doctor Lin's credit." His body was too weak and though Lu Wancheng couldn't get his words to come out loudly, a smile could be made out in his tone, "Qingyu, I'm really happy that I was able to live to reach eighteen. So no matter how it was supposed to be originally, Doctor Lin, who

instead of poisoning me, gave me an extra half year of life, has always been in my eyes a beautiful and kind-hearted protagonist."

"Protagonist" was another unfamiliar word to Lin Qingyu. Maybe it was because the candlelight tonight was too light and gentle, Lin Qingyu didn't feel like guessing anymore and asked directly, "What does 'protagonist' mean?"

Lu Wancheng looked at him and said, "The so-called 'protagonist' is the one who no matter how many glints and flashes of swords and daggers, how much foul wind and bloody rain he has experienced, no matter if it's during the moment he crawls out of the quagmire, he will always be the most dazzling one."

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. Seated beside Lu Wancheng, his posture was relaxed, his eyebrows lowered, his eyes restrained; the coldness all over his body had dissipated and his jade-like face was so beautiful under the flickering candlelight that it made one's heart tremble. With just one glance, Lu Wancheng quickly looked away, not daring to look again.

Shoulder to shoulder, the two sat side by side on the edge of the lower bunk. Lu Wancheng wanted to say something else, but found himself inexplicably

lost for words, his Adam's apple bobbed up and down. He couldn't squeeze out a single word; only that half-dead thing in his chest jumped violently.

Lin Qingyu didn't notice the way he was acting strange. He asked, "In your hometown, what are the customs for celebrating birthdays?"

Lu Wancheng thought about it and said, "We eat longevity noodles?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I'll have someone help you make it."

Taking advantage of it being his birthday, Lu Wancheng reached for a yard after getting an inch, "Why won't you be the one to help me make it?"

Lin Qingyu paused and said, "I'm not very good at it."

Lu Wancheng just smiled, his eyes curving, "Then, just do what you can."

Although Lin Qingyu was not born to a rich and noble family, he was still a proper young master. He had been served by others since he was a child, so he

was naturally, he wasn't very good at cooking. If they were to talk about what he was good at it, then that would be…

Lin Qingyu stood up. "Undress."

Lu Wancheng was momentarily stunned, thinking that he had misheard. "What?"

"I'll give you an acupuncture treatment so that you can sleep more peacefully tonight."

Lu Wancheng's smile froze on his face, he raised his hand and scratched his eyelids with the pads of his fingers. "…Thank you."

On Lu Wancheng's eighteenth birthday, Lin Qingyu gifted him a good night's sleep.

Soon, it was going to be winter. Hua Lu folded and piled up the spring and autumn clothes. She put them in the cabinet and changed them out for the thick clothes of autumn and winter. Last year's old winter clothes were all put in boxes. Hua Lu spent a lot of time sorting them out. Unexpectedly, she found a special set of gorgeous brocade robes in the depths of the wooden box. It was the wedding dress Lin Qingyu wore when he married into the Hou Mansion. Both the crown and veil he wore that day were packed together with it.

Unmarried girls were always enthralled by wedding dresses. Hua Lu unfolded the wedding dress and hung it up. Admiring, she said, "Young Master, Shaojun,

look at what I found."

Lu Wancheng looked over but couldn't understand what she was excited about. "What is this?"

"This is the wedding dress Shaojun wore when he got married, don't you remember?"

Lu Wancheng sat up straight and looked at it for a long time. He said, "It seems it is."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "What are you doing taking this out?"

Hua Lu smiled and said, "Shaojun usually wears plain clothes dyed only a single color and the one you wear most often is white. I have never seen you wearing bright colors."

Huan Tong interjected, "Didn't you see him the day Young Master and Young Master Hou got married?"

"At that time, Young Master was wearing a veil to cover his face. It doesn't count since I didn't see his face." Hua Lu looked at the thoughtful Lu

Wancheng and joked playfully, “Young Master, when you lifted the veil and saw Shaojun in his wedding dress, were you shocked?”

Lu Wancheng was heartbroken: “…I forgot.”

He only thing he remembered was seeing a great classical beauty upon waking up. Then he was too busy being shocked that he forgot to engrave the beauty of this man in his heart. After all that, he was so sleepy that he fell asleep.

Looking back now, he only remembered that he was good-looking but he really didn't have an impression of just how good.

Hua Lu's eyes narrowed: "That was a once-in-a-lifetime event, how could you forget?"

"There's nothing surprising about it." Lin Qingyu added a few pieces of charcoal to the brazier in front of Lu Wancheng, "I myself don't remember how Young Master Hou looked like in his wedding clothes."

On their wedding night, all he thought about was how to poison Lu Wancheng to make him die sooner. How could he have had any other thought to spare on looking at some wedding clothes?

Lu Wancheng pushed the wheelchair to stand before the unfurled wedding dress. He reached out and touched the gorgeous golden silk. He said, "Tell me, Qingyu, how much money will it take for you to wear it again and show me."

Lin Qingyu didn't even lift his head. "If you want worn so much, why don't you wear it yourself?"

"I'll wear it, we can wear it together." Seeing that Lin Qingyu remained unmoved, Lu Wancheng said cheekily, "Please, Oh Miracle-working Doctor Lin."

"You would bow your head to ask for this trifling matter? Can't you have a bit

more dignity?"

Lu Wancheng whispered, "Because I really want to see it." If he were to see it again, he would definitely remember it even if he were to die.

Lin Qingyu hadn't had a chance to respond yet when a servant came in to pass on the message that Pan Yiniang was inviting Shaojun to discuss matters in the front hall.

Early this morning, Lu Niantao had taken a carriage to the palace. This time, Liang Shi did not accompany her.

The candidates for the prince's side concubine hadn't yet been determined. The Empress invited all the noble girls into the palace, saying that it was to admire the flowers. However, everyone knew that this was actually a selection interview for the prince. As soon as the flower viewing party was over, the position of the prince's concubine would be decided.

Although Nan'an Hou deliberately kept his distance from the crown prince, he still had a positive attitude towards his daughter's possible selection. The selection of the side concubine was open and aboveboard; it also had the Emperor's approval. When all was said and done, the crown prince was the crown prince. Sooner or later, he was going to rule the empire. If Nan'an Hou

could have his daughter by his side, this could be considered as having a backer in the future.

"According to the momo in the Second Young Lady's courtyard, the Second Young Lady dressed very plainly today. She used to prefer delicate pink but for her trip to the palace this time, she wore plain white and did not wear too many hair accessories on her head." Pan Shi said, "Compared to the other noble girls, I'm afraid that while she may appear more elegant but not rich enough."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Don't worry, the crown prince might just be fine with this."

Pan Shi said cautiously, "I also heard that her makeup for this time's trip to the palace was a bit strange. She made a beauty mole under her left eye, just… just like yours, Shaojun."

Lin Qingyu didn't have any special reaction when he heard this. He said with a cold expression, "This is the path she chose herself. No one forced her; no one

tempted her. If something were to happen in the future, she will have no one to blame but herself. This has nothing to do with anyone else."

Pan Shi lowered her eyes and agreed, "This is but natural."

Seeing that Pan Shi made no move to leave, Lin Qingyu asked, "Is there anything else Yiniang wishes to discuss?"

Pan Shi hesitated for a moment then said, "I remembered that Shaojun said before that the Young Master… Won't make it to the end of the year."

Lin Qingyu was slightly startled. He said, "Indeed."

"It is already October," Pan Shi looked as though she couldn't bear it, "Is it time to start preparing for the Young Master's funeral?"

Lin Qingyu was silent for a while and said, "I will handle this matter myself."

33

Chapter 32

On the third day after the flower viewing party, a eunuch from the palace came to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion to deliver an imperial decree. The empress and the emperor have selected Lu Niantao to be the crown prince's concubine. Aside from Lu Niantao, the daughter of a military commander had also been selected.

The eunuch who came deliver the good news said that the crown prince and Lu Niantao had met in the garden before the flower viewing party started. Lu Niantao lost a sachet and while she had been looking for it, she ran into the prince. Simple and reserved, natural and unrestrained, she had immediately caught the eyes of the prince.

"To have been able to catch His Royal Highness's eyes, Second Young Lady Lu is very lucky. She will surely be able to earn the Crown Prince's favor in the future."

Lin Qingyu found it laughable. It turned out that there were some people who simply all too eager to get this kind of luck.

However, although a side concubine has a high status, in the end, she was still just a concubine. There would be no wedding that followed the three books and six rites for her. Otherwise, what honor could they give to the crown prince's future wife? The empress had the Bureau of Astronomy choose an

auspicious day on which two sedan chairs would be used to take the girls into the Eastern Palace.

The date of Lu Niantao's entry into the East Palace was set after January and time was very tight. Liang Shi, who had been idle for a long time, finally got busy; going up and down, arranging the dowry for her daughter. Because of her daughter, Nan'an Hou's attitude towards Liang Shi also eased a lot. As for the rest of the Hou household, they were all rushing to ingratiate themselves to the proper wife – The second young lady was soon going to be the crown prince's concubine and when the prince ascends to the throne, she would at least be an imperial concubine. If she were to give birth to a prince, her future would be even more limitless. Who would dare shun them now?

Now that Liang Shi had lung power, she had all the good things in the warehouse moved one by one to the main room. Huan Tong who'd been watching the spectacle, felt his eyes hurt. He was thinking of his young master, of the family property he would take with him when he left the Hou Mansion. "Young Master, I just heard from the manager of the warehouse that the Madam even took the tribute silk from the south that the Empress gave to Young Master Hou!"

Lin Qingyu didn't care. "Let them take it." He hoped that Lu Niantao could use it to make more clothes to win Xiao Cheng's favor. He would like nothing

more than for them to make love every night so that in the end Xiao Cheng would die on top of her.

He knew that his thoughts were too insidious; but Xiao Cheng was worth it.

In a blink of an eye, it was already the day when Lu Niantao was to be married off.

On this auspicious occasion, Nan'an Hou and Liang Shi were seated on the seats of honor in the main hall, with the clansmen of the Lu clan on either side. Among Lu Niantao's generation, only Lu Wancheng was sitting in a wheelchair; everyone else was standing.

Not long after, Lu Niantao, wearing a feng guan xia pei, supported by the matron of honor, entered slowly into the main hall. The wedding dress of the prince's concubine came from the palace's Shangfu Bureau. It was graceful and elegant, markedly more resplendent than Lin Qingyu's wedding attire had

been. Lu Niantao had on a golden hairpin crown, strung with a bead curtain. A huadian was drawn between her eyebrows.

Lu Wancheng remembered an important matter. He said to Lin Qingyu, “Qingyu, did you also have a huadian on your forehead on your wedding night?”

“Not just a huadian,” Lin Qingyu said expressionlessly, “I even had makeup on.”

Lu Wancheng pounded the armrest of the wheelchair. “D*mn it, how could I have been sleeping at that time?”

Lu Niantao walked up to her parents, knelt down and bowed. “This daughter is un-filial, unable to serve upon her parents’ sides. I ask my father and mother to accept my obeisance in return for their kindness of raising me.”

With tears in her eyes, Liang Shi helped her daughter up. She was about to speak when a steward rushed in and said, “Master, Madam, the Crown Prince is here. He said he’s here to personally pick up his concubine!”

As soon as his words fell, the hall immediately became chaotic.

According to the etiquette, the crown prince needed only to wait for her arrival in the Eastern Palace. Personally coming by to pick up his concubine was truly giving the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion a lot of face.

The Lu clanmen showered Nan’an Hou with congratulations. “His Royal

Highness has truly set his eyes on your daughter. This is truly a blessing for our Lu Clan!"

"Given this treatment, she doesn't seem at all to be just a concubine. Compared to this, even a big wedding isn't much to speak of."

Even at this time, Nan'an Hou did not forget to be discreet in his words and deeds. "Don't talk nonsense. A wife is a wife and a concubine is a concubine. How can you speak of the two in the same breath? Follow me to greet His Royal Highness."

Under the bead curtain, Lu Niantao's expression changed and the matron of honor covered her head with a veil.

Lin Qingyu said, "Shall we go?"

Lu Wancheng's smile was somewhat cold. "Let's go. In any case, he is my older cousin and he's accepted my own younger sister as his concubine. No matter what, we should go and express our thanks."

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng's wheelchair, following everyone to the gate of the Nan'an Hou's Mansion. Xiao Cheng hadn't come on horseback like an ordinary bridegroom who was to escort his concubine would. Instead, he sat in the crown prince's palanquin and even when Nan'an Hou had already arrived, he didn't get off. He wasn't here so much to fetch his bride as he was to

show off his status. In Lu Wancheng's words, he was: once again putting on a show.

Nan'an Hou led the entire family to pay their respects to the crown prince. Xiao Cheng said slowly, "You may dispense with the bowing". His eyes scanned the crowd and zeroed in on Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng beside him. The corners of his lips ticked up in an amused smile and it was only then that he walked out of the palanquin.

The matron of honor helped Lu Niantao to step over the threshold. She thought that she was to hand Lu Niantao to Xiao Cheng's hand like one would in a normal marriage. Xiao Cheng merely paused and said, "Help the side concubine onto the palanquin."

The matron of honor was stunned but didn't dare question him. And so, she took Lu Niantao to the palanquin. Xiao Cheng went straight to Lu Wancheng and said, "My dear cousin has been ill for a very long time. Both my mother

the Empress and I are constantly worried. Might I know if my cousin's health has taken a turn for the better recently?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "I haven't gotten much better, I'm afraid His Highness will have to continue to worry."

Xiao Cheng leaned down. Though his words were directed to Lu Wancheng, his eyes were trained at Lin Qingyu: "My cousin, do not worry. After you go, Gu shall take good care of Little Qingyu for you."

" 'Little Qingyu' " Lu Wancheng laughed softly, "I'm a little curious, what would His Highness call his newly wedded concubine – Little Taotao?"

Xiao Cheng narrowed his eyes, displeased, "Cousin still has the strength to joke. It would be better to save your strength, use it to take care of your body. After all, when a person dies, everything is over."

Lu Wancheng smiled slightly, "Your Highness can rest assured. Nothing is over until I say it's over."

Xiao Cheng straightened his body, gave Lin Qingyu a deep look then turned around and said, "We're heading back to the palace."

The gathered clansmen gradually drifted away. Nan'an Hou and Liang Shi were busy seeing the members of the Lu Clan off. Lin Qingyu and Lu

Wancheng did not join in the fun and returned to the Blue Wind Pavilion.

Lin Qingyu frowned and said, “Xiao Cheng already has Lu Niantao. Why…”

“Why was he still looking at you with that disgusting look?” Lu Wancheng kept him in suspense, “Do you know what people who like to look for substitutes have in common?”

“Tell me.”

Lu Wancheng’s tone was contemptuous: “They like to ignore what they’ve already got and they’re always eager to get what they can’t. If you had joined

him early on, he wouldn't be so interested in you. But now, you've become the first person who has dared to reject him. So, of course, he sees you differently."

Lin Qingyu's brows furrowed even tighter. "Isn't he selling himself cheap?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "That's right, this is exactly a case of selling himself cheap—cough."

Lu Wancheng coughed again, unable to stop. Lin Qingyu patted his back and said, "Go and sleep for a while."

Lu Wancheng fell asleep after drinking his medicine. Hua Lu walked in from outside, looked around and said, "Shaojun, where is the Young Master?"

"He has just fallen asleep. What is it?"

Hua Lu lowered her voice: "That fellow from Xiong Si is here."

Xiong Si was a shop that sold funeral items. Lin Qingyu chose the oldest Xiong Si in the capital. The Dayu had yet to be established when this shop was already operating for a hundred years. In addition to selling goods, the Xiong

Si could also arrange funerals for their customers. So long as there was money, they could arrange for a magnificent send off.

Lin Qingyu glanced at the inner room and asked, “Where is he?”

“He’s waiting at the gate of the mansion.” Hua Lu said, “He said that since the Hou’s Mansion is holding a wedding today, it is inconvenient for him to enter lest he bring bad luck.”

Lin Qingyu saw the man from the Xiong Si at the gate of the Hou’s mansion. Although he was in the funeral business, he was lively and cheerful. “If you have any requests, feel free to ask. Our shop will do our very best to handle this funeral for the Hou’s mansion. .”

Lin Qingyu had never been involved in arranging a funeral so it was inevitable that he would be at a loss. He looked at the word “Xi” pasted on the gate of the

Hou Mansion and at the red silk ribbons hanging under the eaves. He thought for a long time, and said, “Just arrange it according to his wishes.”

During this period, Lu Wancheng slept a lot and woke up a lot. Every time, he would be able to sleep for less than an hour, woken up by coughing. Sleeping and waking, sleeping and waking and the day would be over.

This time he woke up towards the evening. He saw Lin Qingyu sitting beside his bed, watching him quietly, the setting sun coating him with a warm afterglow.

A double image appeared in front of Lu Wancheng’s eyes and he subconsciously called out, “Qingyu…”

Lin Qingyu said, “I’m here.”

Lu Wancheng asked, confused, “Is there any news from the Eastern Palace?”

Lin Qingyu was silent.

Spices and perfumes enter from the nose and it would take far more than a day to achieve the desired effect. Without three or five months, it would be difficult to see results.

“Let’s not talk about this for now.” Lin Qingyu said gently, “Wancheng, what

color do you like?"

Lu Wancheng was momentarily dazed. As if he had realized something, he said with a smile, "If it was me before, I would wear mostly black, white and gray. But in the Dayu, I'd like to wear red. It goes well with long hair."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Alright."

"By the way, is Doctor Lin preparing for my funeral?" Lu Wancheng said with a smile, "The other details don't matter but can I choose the coffin myself?"

"…Why?"

Lu Wancheng joked, "I want to pick one that's comfortable to sleep in."

34

Chapter 33

Lin Qingyu thought that Lu Wancheng was just speaking offhand but unexpectedly, he really wa concerned about his funeral. He thought that Xiong Si's clothes were too ugly and said that he would wear his own clothes into the coffin. The thought that the white clothes worn by the funeral procession was too monotonous and asked if it was possible to have them wear a riot of colors instead. When Lu Wancheng found out that what he wanted couldn't be inscribed on his tombstone, he picked a fight with Lin Qingyu.

"Why not?" Lu Wancheng said angrily, "I don't have the right to decide what to write on my own epitaph?"

Lin Qingyu mocked, "'Here lies Salted Fish. Finally sleeping in death.' After thousands of years, how do you think future generations would think of you?"

Lu Wancheng smiled, all carefree and leisurely. He said, "They would probably think me a talented person who was ahead of his time. Then, they would put me on top of 'The Dayu's Eight Great Masters' or some such sort…"

Lin Qingyu interrupted ruthlessly, "Even in dreaming, one must have a sense of proportion."

Lu Wancheng looked very disappointed that his carefully created humorous stanzas couldn't be engraved on his tombstone. Sitting on his wheelchair, he

sighed with his head lowered. Seeing it made Hua Lu's maternal instincts overflow. Lin Qingyu ignored him and went to the study to handle his own matters.

It didn't take long for Hua Lu to find him with a plate of freshly washed jujubes. She seemed to want to say something but hesitated. "Shaojun, would you like some jujubes?"

"If you've got something to say, just say it."

Hua Lu hesitated for a long time then said, "This is the Young Master's final month. I think you should treat him better and accommodate him more."

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly: "But, he doesn't want to be accommodated."

Hua Lu was surprised: "Huh?"

"He's thinking up of every means to get us to relax. How can we fail to live up to his kindly intentions?" Lin Qingyu's voice had a touch of untraceable tenderness, "Tell everyone in the Blue Wind Pavilion that during these last few days, we will do what needs doing. We shall carry on as usual."

Hua Lu didn't quite understand, but she believed in Shaojun. She has been serving the Eldest Young Master for so long and yet she still didn't dare to say that she understood him. It has been but less than a year since the Shaojun

married into the family and yet he had already seen through the Eldest Young Master.

This was probably what the literati called a bosom friend.

The coffin was where the deceased would lay in eternal rest. It was the most important thing in the funeral ceremony. Lin Qingyu remembered what Lu Wancheng said and he really did take him with him when it came time to choose the coffin. The Xiong Si couldn't move the coffins into the Hou Mansion for them to choose from so they could only be inconvenienced to take a trip to the shop.

Particular kinds of shops like the Xiong Si were usually located in some hidden out of the way street. This entire street was filled almost exclusively with shops that dealt with the business of death. The largest one among these was called Wu Wang Tang and this was Xiong Si commissioned by Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng to the front of the shop. Huan Tong timidly followed behind. He had his arms around himself, rubbing his arms. He felt that this street was much colder than outside. A chill wind was whizzing and from time to time, they would pass by shops with paper figures placed at their door. It made goosebumps rise on the skin of those who saw it.

The shop assistant of Wu Wang Tang learned that the Shaojun of the Hou's Mansion was coming and he had been waiting at the door since early that

morning. “This humble servant pays his greetings to Shaojun.” Upon seeing Lu Wancheng in the wheelchair, he said in surprise, “Could this be…”

Huan Tong said, “This is our family’s Young Master Hou.”

Lu Wancheng greeted the shop assistant with a smile, leaving him stunned. He has been in this business for so long but he has never seen anyone who personally came to the Xiong Si to choose his coffin.

Lin Qingyu asked, “The products?”

The shop assistant was clever and quick to respond. He hurriedly said with a smile, “Everything is ready. Please come this way, Young Master Hou, Shaojun.”

Although Wu Wang Tang had a small frontage, inside, it was a completely different world. The newly-made coffins were neatly arranged in the rear courtyard and there were different types. The man introduced them one by one: “This is Catalpa wood while that is Cedar. Catalpa won’t corrode easily and it is resistant to humidity and moisture. Cedar has a fine texture and won’t deform… Which two types would you like, Shaojun, Young Master Hou?”

Lu Wancheng found his blind spot. “Two types?”

The shop assistant said, “Since Young Master Hou is married, naturally, the Shaojun shall be buried in the same grave with him in the future. As they say husband and wife by the first marriage share a quilt in live and a pit in death. A

hundred years later, Young Master Hou and Shaojun shall be buried together in the same grave and they will continue their fated relationship in the afterlife."

For a while, both Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng fell silent.

Lin Qingyu had never spared any thought before to being buried in the same grave as Lu Wancheng. Only after being reminded by the shop assistant did he realize the meaning of "husband and wife by the first marriage".

Even though, in the beginning, he and Lu Wancheng were ungrateful and unwilling parties to this marriage, it was still a marriage following the three books and six rites; they had worshipped heaven and earth; they had made obeisance in the main hall. Theirs was completely different from Xiao Cheng and Lu Niantao's.

A knot between husband and wife, to love each other and have no doubts.

In life, to be by your side; in death, to long forever.

The words "husband and wife by the first marriage" were unavoidably too heavy.

Lu Wancheng smiled and said to Lin Qingyu, "Buried together… It's too early to be saying such things. Besides, I'm used to sleeping alone. I don't mind being buried together, but I would be wronging you too badly if I were to have you

buried in the Lu Family's ancestral tomb." If it were the Jiang family's ancestral tomb, he might think about it.

The shop assistant looked at Lin Qingyu in embarrassment. "Shaojun, this…"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "You need only follow Young Master Hou's wishes."

The shop assistant didn't dare to comment. "A lot of Wu Wang Tang's new models are displayed at the back. Shoajun, Young Master Hou, please follow me."

Suddenly, there was a faint voice of a woman's mutterings. Huan Tong was so frightened that he leaned on Lin Qingyu. "Young Master, did you hear someone crying?"

The shop assistant explained, "Don't be afraid, little brother. That's just another customer, here to look at the coffin."

Their party followed the shop assistant past rows and rows of coffins and sure enough, they saw a woman. The woman was dressed in white silk mourning

clothes. Her eyes were unfocused. She appeared thin and pallid, weak like a willow. Even so, it was not difficult to see her former beauty.

The man whispered, “This is Madam Huo. Her husband contracted tuberculosis three years ago and passed away at home yesterday.”

Madam Hou was originally a talented actress from the Jiaofangsi. By chance, she met a scholar, a son of nobility and the two became each other’s sunshine. Despite his parent’s disapproval, they made a pledge to be married. The scholar spent his family’s wealth to redeem her freedom. He thought he would be able to accompany her to grow old but after just a few years since their wedding, they were separated, one on earth and one in heaven, never to see each other again.

The shop assistant sighed, “Madam Hou is a frail lady who’s been subjected to the hardships of life since she was born. She has no mother or father and she

has lost her husband so early. Moreover, with her beauty, I'm afraid her remaining days will not be easy."

Their group was standing not far away from Madam Hou but it was as if she could neither see nor hear them. Her hand gently stroked a Cedar wood coffin and murmured, " Oh to be the southwest wind and tumble into your arms… "

As her words faded, a stream of clear tears slowly slid down from the corner of her eyes and scattered into splashes.

Lin Qingyu retracted his gaze and said, "Let's go."

Lu Wancheng was silent for a moment, then said with a smile, "I think that Cedar coffin is pretty good. Are there any other styles for me to see?"

Wu Wang Tang deserved their famous reputation in the capital. They got things done quickly and well. In a few days, except for the Cedar coffin that Lu Wancheng wanted, everything else was already ready. In Lu Wancheng's own words, he could 'peace out and say 'see ya later" to everyone at any time.

After everything was prepared, the shop assistant went to the Hou Mansion to settle the accounts. Lin Qingyu was satisfied with how good a job he did and personally rewarded him. The shop assistant took his reward and said with a

smile, “I must return to the shop to handle matters. This humble servant won’t be disturbing Young Master Hou and Shaojun any longer.”

Lu Wancheng asked casually, “Does your Wu Wang Tang get busier in winter?”

“That is for certain.” The shop assistant said, “There are many old people who can’t survive the winter. But today, there was only one deceased, a young

woman… Young Master Hou and Shaojun should still remember. It was Madam Hou who you saw at Wu Wang Tang that day."

Lu Wancheng was taken aback. "She was fine just the day before yesterday. Why so sudden?"

The shop assistant sighed. "Madam Hou couldn't bear the pain of bereavement. After finishing the funeral for her husband, she drowned herself in the lake that night."

Hearing this, Hua Lu covered her mouth, he eyes turning red. Huan Tong too was quite moved. Lin Qingyu glanced at Lu Wancheng, and said to the shop assistant. "You've worked hard. Please go on ahead."

After the shop assistant left, Lu Wancheng was noticeably quieter. Lin Qingyu could probably guess why he was. It must have something to do with Madam Hou.

Sure enough, after Lu Wancheng finished drinking his medicine, he suddenly

asked him, “Qingyu, you should still…not regard me as your husband, right?”

Lin Qingyu said, “I’ve told you before. I treat you as a friend and a confidant.”

Okay, alright. Just a friend and confidant.

But the passing of a close friend would still hurt and make one sad.

“I don’t want to be even be a close friend anymore.” Lu Wancheng was a little anxious, “Just treat me as… a tool.”

A tool… a tool to be thrown away after use? A tool without any emotional involvement?

Lu Wancheng wanted him to do this?

Lin Qingyu sneered. “Lu Wancheng, who do you take me for?”

Lu Wancheng was stunned: “…Qingyu?”

“Do you think that after you die, I will be like other widowers, washing my face with tears all day, seeking death, tiring of living?” Lin Qingyu’s voice was cold, like a snowy winter day, “You think I will abandon myself to despair, remain at a standstill, live my life missing you? You are wrong, Lu Wancheng. If I was so vulnerable and indecisive, when I married you, I would have smashed my head to my death on our bridal bed. “Lin Qingyu looked at Lu

Wancheng, his Adam's apple bobbed up and down. He said calmly, "Don't worry. I will watch you go, and then…I will live well."

Lu Wancheng stared at him for a long time, his eyes seemed filled with limpid autumn waters. He said, almost like a sigh, "What should I do, Qingyu? You have really… completely grown on my sexuality."

35

Chapter 34

It was the beginning of winter, the water was beginning to freeze, the ground as well. The greenery has withered and the insects now lay hidden and dormant. The fragrance of the sweet-scented osmanthus tree in the Blue Wind Pavilion was gone, only layers of dead branches remained.

At the other end of the Hou Mansion was Liang Shi's courtyard. The weather was getting colder and colder, but the main hall was full of spring and vitality. Ever since Lu Niantao was married into the Eastern Palace as a concubine, Liang Shi gradually returned to favor. Nan'an Hou even intended to give her back part of the power of managing the household. Even the sick Lu Qiaosong

regained his vigor and went around looking for famous doctors for a cure to his impotence.

After hearing about this, Lu Wancheng asked Lin Qingyu, “Lu Qiaosong’s illness should be incurable, right?”

Lin Qingyu affirmed. “Naturally.”

“Then I’m relieved.” Lu Wancheng coughed twice and laughed, “Qingyu, we seem constantly gloat over the misfortunes of others together. We are malicious, petty people who curse at others indiscriminately.”

Lin Qingyu also smiled. “It’s good being a malicious and petty person.”

As the two were talking, Hua Lu walked in to refresh their tea for them. Lu Wancheng saw that her eyes were a little red as though she’d been crying, and asked, “What’s wrong, Hua Lu? Who bullied you?”

Hua Lu pouted and muttered, “No one.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Was it Huan Tong?”

Hua Lu was the Blue Wind Pavilions highest-ranking maid. Only Huan Tong would dare make her angry.

Hua Lu originally didn’t feel it was anything much but when the two master showed their concern about it, her grievance suddenly welled up. Choked with

sobs, she told them what had happened. It turned that painting a huadian on one's forehead had recently come into fashion in the capital. Hua Lu was drawn in by the novelty of it and though she hadn't drawn one before, drew one for herself this morning. Though she was agile in her work, she found her hands clumsy when she tried applying makeup on herself. The plum blossom she painted on herself as all a mess and in a moment of carelessness, she was accidentally caught by Huan Tong. He had laughed at her, saying that she was Dong Shi imitating Xi Shi's frown.

"Huan Tong, that brute, doesn't he know how to respect girls?" Lu Wancheng comforted Hua Lu, "It's okay, I'll scold him for you later. Your Young Master is an expert when it comes to scolding people. I'll scold him so badly, his own mother wouldn't recognize him. "

Hua Lu finally broke into a smile.

Lin Qingyu said, "I can draw a huadian. I'll draw one for you to apologize on his behalf."

Lu Wancheng wondered, "Aren't girls the only ones who know how to draw a huadian? How do you know how to?"

"How difficult could it be?" Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Hua Lu, bring your dressing case."

Hua Lu seldom wore makeup so she didn't have much in the way of makeup. However, she did still have rouge, this item commonly used by women. Lin

Qingyu took a clean brush and dipped it in rouge. Brush in one hand and holding back his sleeve with the other, Lin Qingyu drew carefully between Hua Lu's eyebrows.

Hua Lu was shrouded in the refined fragrance of books. When she looked up, she could see the Shaojun's cold and beautiful jawline. Her whole body tensed up. Even though she had nothing but reverence for the Shaojun, at this moment, she felt her heart racing and her face flush with heat. She couldn't

help but think, if Shaojun hadn't married into the Hou Mansion and became a male wife, how many young girls' hearts would he have captured?"

After a while, Lin Qingyu put down his brush and said, "It's done."

Lin Qingyu painted a small group of burning flames. Though made with but a few strokes, it appeared vivid and playful. Hua Lu looked at herself in the mirror and exclaimed, "Shaojun is amazing!"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "It's beautiful. So pretty. You'll surely blind that Huan Tong's dog eyes."

Hua Lu's cheeks flushed with shyness. "Who wants to show him?"

Lu Wancheng the said, "Qingyu, you're so good at drawing. How about drawing one for yourself?"

Lin Qingyu replied, "Since you're so interested, how about I draw one for you?"

Lu Wancheng cheerfully said, "Alright."

In the end, Lu Wancheng's Huadian wasn't able to be finished. A servant came in to report that Imperial Physician Hu was here.

For Lin Qingyu, Hu Ji was their main source of news from the palace. He

immediately had the servant ask Doctor Hu in and serve hot tea.

As soon as Hu Ji saw that Lu Wancheng was lying on a luohan instead of sitting up on a wheelchair despite it being the middle of the day, he knew that Lu Wancheng's situation was not optimistic. He wisely did not ask after Lu Wancheng's health, going straight to reporting to Lin Qingyu the current situation in the palace, especially in the Eastern Palace.

The crown prince had accepted two side concubines at once and the Eastern Palace was bustling with activity. One of the two concubines came from a family of civil servants, the other from a military family. One had a gentle temperament, the other a lively one. According to the eunuchs in the Eastern Palace, at first, the crown prince treated the two concubines equally on the surface, but in private, he preferred Lu Shi a bit more; once staying with Lu Shi for three consecutive days. But later, the freshness wore off and the prince became a lot more indifferent to both concubines. He would occasionally drop in on them but it was now more like a routine matter.

"What did I say?" Lu Wancheng said slowly, "For the crown prince, it is what is unattainable that is best."

Lin Qingyu frowned slightly. He had thought that Lu Niantao would be favored for at least half a year. He had overestimated Lu Niantao. If Xiao

Cheng won't stay with her often, the time when the poison would break out would be further delayed.

Lu Wancheng's current condition, how could he possibly wait for that day?

Lin Qingyu said irritably, "Useless idiot, can't even compete for favor."

"Don't be angry," Lu Wancheng coaxed. "Lu Niantao…cough, she's a smart girl. And she's very eager to come out on top. She'll find a way to be favored."

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes, calmed himself down and asked about other things. He heard that an epidemic had broken out in the south as soon as winter arrived. No one knew what their current situation was.

"The situation is very bad. Several villages in Hongzhou have now been emptied. It has been a very eventful autumn, with an epidemic in the south and war in the west," The more Hu Ji spoke, the more sentimental he became. "The Emperor's health as well is slowly deteriorating."

Speaking of the west, Lin Qingyu thought of his father who was far away in Yongliang. He asked, "Does Doctor Hu have news about my father?"

Hu Ji said, "The Pan Yuan has been trying to detoxify General Gu since he arrived in Yongliang. But who knows where those Xiliang thieves got those strange poisons. The Pan Yuan has tried all kinds of remedies, but still to no

effect. He's getting weaker day after day. I heard that he probably won't be able to make it through the New Year."

Lu Wancheng said casually, "Then I'm going to have a face-to-face with this General Gu down in the Nine Springs."

General Gu was born to a poor family. He joined the army at the age of fourteen. He led military operations with extraordinary skill, performed countless meritorious deeds and it was through his strength that the western border was protected. Now, at the age of 30, he has no father, no mother, no wife and no son. His spear was his only family.

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Thus is the injustice of heaven."

Those who deserve to die don't die immediately, but those who don't deserve to die can't even be blessed with a natural death.

After Hu Ji left, the relaxed atmosphere of drawing the huadian not long ago completely disappeared. Lu Wancheng looked out the window and laughed at

himself. “Am I really going to die earlier than Xiao Cheng? Sigh, I just can’t seem to accept that.”

Lin Qingyu was silent, then said, “There will be other ways – there will definitely be other ways.”

Lu Wancheng smiled. “En, yes.”

Despite having said that, no matter how much they wanted Xiao Cheng to die already, this was a thing more easily said than done. After all, they couldn’t even enter the palace.

Had he known earlier that something like this would happen, he might have just abandoned medicine to pursue martial arts. When Xiao Cheng called him

“Little Qingyu”, he wanted nothing more than to cut Xiao Cheng’s neck right then there and watch as the light in his eyes disappeared.

Lin Qingyu gradually became restless and uneasy. He lay on Lu Wancheng’s upper bunk and couldn’t sleep all night. He had no choice but to give himself a sleeping aid.

How on earth could he make Lu Wancheng live a little longer… Just a little longer?

On this day, Lu Wancheng woke up from his nap and saw that Lin Qingyu wasn’t there. He called out, “Hua Lu, help me up.”

Hua Lu put down her work and helped Lu Wancheng to sit up. While she was at it, she stuffed a soft pillow behind him. “What would you like to do, Young Master?”

Lu Wancheng paused for a long time and said, “There is a prescription in the second cabinet on the left. Take it to the people in the pharmacy and ask them to decoct my medicine according to this prescription from now on.”

Hua Lu was worried. “Who made this prescription? Let’s show it to Shaojun first.”

Lu Wancheng smiled: “It’s okay. This prescription was made by my father-in-

law."

"Ah, it's from pan yuan daren. Then it must be a good prescription." Hua Lu said happily, "I'll go right away."

Lu Wancheng stopped her. "You don't need to tell Shaojun about this. Hmm… But he's so smart, he'll definitely be able to tell with just one look."

They didn't know quite when it started but Lin Qingyu began to personally serve Lu Wancheng his medicine. As soon as it was time for Lu Wancheng to drink his medicine, Lin Qingyu returned to their room. Hua Lu brought over

the medicine. He took the medicine bowl and as soon as he smelled it, he knew that this wasn't the medicine he had prescribed to Lu Wancheng.

Lin Qingyu suddenly raised his eyes.

Lu Wancheng smiled at him. "What's wrong?"

Lin Qingyu's fingernails almost plunged into his palm. He shook his head and said as calmly as possible, "It's nothing."

If this was Lu Wancheng's choice, he would respect it.

"When did you ask my father for it?" Lin Qingyu asked.

Lu Wancheng made no effort to hide. "Remember how I woke up early on the day father-in-law left the capital?"

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "Such is fate. Aren't you afraid of pain?"

"How painful can it be?" Lu Wancheng seemed unconcerned. "Women can endure the pain of childbirth. No matter how painful it is, it shouldn't be as painful as giving birth, right?"

Lin Qingyu seemed to have something stuck in his chest and said, voice hoarse, "Didn't you say that your fate was up to heaven? That it isn't up to

you?"

"Ah" Lu Wancheng said, "Then, I want to see the snow, see it a lot… and then I'll go."

Lin Qingyu said nothing, patiently feeding Lu Wancheng all the medicine. Then, he stayed with him until the medicine started to take effect.

Lu Wancheng's expression didn't change much but blue veins appeared on his forehead. Not long after, he broke out in cold sweat. When he met Lin Qingyu's gaze, he blocked Lin Qingyu's eyes with his hand and said with a trembling smile, "Don't look. My face must be all twisted now. It's hideous."

Lin Qingyu took his hand down and held it in his palm. He said softly, "What can I do to make you feel better?"

Lu Wancheng thought for a while, and then said, "Well… Will you let me take a bit of advantage?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment and asked, "What advantage?"

"Don't worry, I won't go too far. I just want to hear you call me…"

Lin Qingyu guessed, "Wancheng Gege?"

That really had been what Lu Wancheng was going to say. However, seeing Lin Qingyu's unconcealed expression of concern, he suddenly changed his mind

and wanted to go a little further.

Anyway… Lin Qingyu will never ever know what he wanted to express.

Lu Wancheng shook his head. “Not ‘gege’. Call me ‘ Lao Gong‘.”

Lin Qingyu was stunned and asked helplessly, “Do you know what the word ‘Lao Gong’ means in Dayu?”

“I know, it means ‘eunuch’, right?” Lu Wancheng wanted to talk to Lin Qingyu in his usual teasing tone, but he was in so much pain that he was barely able to show a broken smile, “But the truth is, my lifelong dream has been to go to the palace and become a eunuch.”

Lin Qingyu: “…” Lu Wancheng must have already lost all rationality from the pain and so he’s able to spout such nonsense.

Lu Wancheng said with difficulty, “Can you let me take this advantage?”

How could he not?

Lin Qingyu gently wiped the cold sweat from his forehead with the hem of his sleeve and whispered, “Lao Gong.”

Lu Wancheng smiled weakly, suppressing the groan that almost overflowed from his mouth because of the pain. He smiled, eyes curving, “That sounds so nice. Thank you, Lao Po.”

36

Chapter 35

Father Lin's prescription used poison to fight poison, using poison to stimulate the potential vitality of the patient, thereby prolonging his life. The toxicity of the medicine was too strong. After entering the body, the poison is released, bringing unbearable pain and some uncontrollable side effects to the patient. After only three days of taking the medicine, Lu Wancheng's legs gradually lost feeling.

Even so, the time it could buy was limited. After winter began, every day could be Lu Wancheng's last. But as long as he was still alive, Xiao Cheng would not be stupid enough to lay his hands on the Hou Mansion's Shaojun. Just as Xiao

Cheng himself had said, he would wait and when Lu Wancheng died, everything would be over.

In mid-October, Zhang Shiquan, who had been away from the capital for several months, was finally able to return. The first thing he did after his return was to ask to see the two masters.

During this period, Lu Wancheng was asleep most of the time and Zhang Shiquan only saw Lin Qingyu alone.

“Shaojun, I have investigated the matter completely.” Zhang Shiquan’s voice was extremely low, “The extra income from the villages in Xuzhou did indeed come from a private salt business.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes darkened, and he laughed. “To say that Liang Shi is capable, but she can’t even protect her own children; to say that she is incompetent, but she has the guts to do such deeds that once exposed would earn the death penalty. Oh but she is truly an extraordinary person.”

During the reign of the late emperor, Dayu’s illicit salt trade ran rampant despite repeated prohibition, which seriously affected the income of the court. After the current emperor ascended the throne, he vigorously cracked down on the illicit salt trade, even introducing a new salt law. Selling illicit salt in excess of a certain amount was a capital offense. However, the profits of

private salt trade were huge and many people still took the risk out of great desperation. Lin Qingyu didn't expect that Liang Shi would be one of them.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and then said, "If it is a private salt trade, the income on the books shouldn't be just that much."

"Shoajun is wise. The village is just a pretense and most of it falls to the hands of the Madam's family."

This was not surprising. Compared to the Hou Mansion, Liang Shi's family could only be regarded as a humble one. Thinking they were in a remote place where law and decrees were not strictly enforced, they used the name of the Nan'an Hou Mansion's village to act as they saw fit in Xuzhou, amassing wealth while keeping a low profile. The local officials in Xuzhou, even if they perceived something off, turned a blind eye for the sake of the Nan'an Hou's face.

Given the cautiousness of Nan'an Hou, he definitely wouldn't have dared to do engage in such shady business. It may be assumed that he has been kept in the dark. Once the matter was exposed, His Majesty, in light of his many years of devotion, might not resort to such drastic steps as to execute the whole family

and confiscate all his property but seizure of some of the family's wealth was inevitable.

Zhang Shiquan asked, "Shaojun, can you tell Young Master Hou about this?"

"No need." Lu Wancheng was still alive. He was nominally a member of Nan'an Hou household and he would be implicated when the matter was revealed. Lin Qingyu looked out the window and said indifferently, "After he goes, I will take care of… everyone."

The two talked about the details of the many evidences gathered. Lin Qingyu thought about how Xuzhou was not far from Hongzhou and asked, "On your way back to the capital from the south, did you encounter an epidemic?"

Zhang Shi's face was grave. "The epidemic is raging. Once people are infected, they will have a high fever and abdominal pain the next day, with blisters all over their bodies. Those who are weak will die within three days. Villages and villages in Hongzhou are filled with the dead. Many refugee families are making their way north and in the north, cases have begun to appear. Who knows when this will bring disaster to the capital. I heard that famous doctors

from all over the world are gathering at the Imperial Physician's Office, in order to find an effective cure for the epidemic as soon as possible."

It was troubled times and the situation was unstable. This may be the coldest winter for the Dayu in the past ten years.

There was a low cough from the inner room. It was Lu Wancheng, who had just woken up. Zhang Shiquan said, "Shoajun, I wish to pay my respects to Young Master Hou. I do not know…"

When all was said and done, it was Lu Wancheng who called Zhang Shiquan to the mansion. Lin Qingyu understood his loyalty and said, "Go, don't stay too long."

When Lu Wancheng woke up, he wanted to drink his medicine. Today's medicine was late and Lin Qingyu planned to go to the pharmacy to personally take a look. Zhang Shiquan followed Hua Lu into the inner room. He saw Lu Wancheng lying on the bottom bunk, his face, gray and ashen. He needed to be supported by others even just to sit up. Even if Zhang Shiquan wasn't a doctor,

he could tell that Lu Wancheng was wasting away from sickness and that he didn't have long.

Lu Wancheng didn't have the strength to speak. "You're back."

Zhang Shiquan felt a soreness in his heart. "I'm here to pay my respects to Young Master Hou."

Lu Wancheng asked Hua Lu to withdraw first and asked, "Have you done what Shaojun asked you to do?"

Zhang Shiquan remembered that the Shaojun told him to talk too much and so he said, "Do not worry, Young Master Hou. Everything is under the Shaojun's control."

Lu Wancheng nodded lightly. "Then about that thing I asked you to handle, have you found the person?"

"I have." Zhang Shiquan took out from his bosom something wrapped in a handkerchief. "This is the token that Young Master wanted."

Lu Wancheng moved his finger and motioned Zhang Shiquan to open the handkerchief. Zhang Shiquan asked, "Can I tell the Shoajun about this?"

Lu Wancheng shook his head. "The time hasn't come yet." He thought for a

while and said, “Go and call the house’s carpenter for me.”

On the other side of the mansion, before Lin Qingyu could even enter the pharmacy, he heard the sounds of arguing, among them was Huan Tong’s voice.

“Blue Wind Pavilion uses this kind of fleeceflower root every day. Everyone knows it!”

“The Eldest Young Master is sick, but can you say that the Third Young Master isn’t? There aren’t many pharmacies that have the thousand-year fleeceflower root. Your Blue Wind Pavilion used to take it all before. So what if we take a little bit today?”

Huan Tong said angrily, “How can the illness of the Third Young Master be compared with that of the Young Master Hou’s!”

Lin Qingyu interrupted: “What’s going on?”

When everyone saw Lin Qingyu, they immediately closed their mouths; however, they were obviously unconvinced. This time, the Madam was making a comeback, and the Eldest Young Master was dying, he didn’t have

much time left. The servants were naturally less respectful to this Shaojun who was about to become a widow.

“Young Master!” Huan Tong ran up to him and told him what happened, filled with righteous indignation.

With the encouragement of his mother and sister, Lu Qiaosong regained his strength. He found countless doctors to examine his condition. He didn’t dare expect to be able to return to his previous state of doing it seven times a night; he just wanted to leave a way out for himself.

A few days ago, there was a doctor from the Jianghu who came to the mansion to volunteer his services, saying that he had a sure way to make Lu Qiaosong regain his glory. Men at death’s door will turn in desperation to any doctor. Without any concern about this quack’s origins, Lu Qiaosong had his servants make the medicine according to his prescription. Among the ingredients was the thousand-year fleeceflower root. As the name suggested, it was a once in a millennium potent medicine. Even in a noble’s house like the Nan’an Hou’s, their supplies were meager.

Lu Wancheng’s medicine also needed the thousand year fleeceflower root. Lin Qingyu spent a lot of money to find some and the supplies on hand were for Lu Wancheng’s medicine. Today, Huan Tong came to get the medicine as usual and happened to bump into the people from Qingdai Pavilion asking the

pharmacy staff to give them some of the thousand-year fleeceflower root from Blue Wind Pavilion. Huan Tong rushed in immediately to stop it.

Lin Qingyu said: “In the future, the Blue Wind Pavilion’s medicines will not be kept in the pharmacy. Huan Tong, bring back the Young Master Hou’s medicine. We will prepare it ourselves.”

A daring momo from Qingdai Pavilion stepped forward and said, “Shaojun, the Eldest Young Master and the Third Young Master are biological brothers. The Third Young Master needs medicine. Can the Young Master Hou as the older brother not give way to his younger brother?”

“No,” Lin Qingyu said coldly, “Tell your Third Young Master that his illness will never be cured in this life. He will always be a ‘useless’ person.”

Momo gritted her teeth and said, deliberately ambiguous, “Shaojun said that. I can only relay what you said to the Third Young Master and the Madam.

When the Madam visits the palace, she will also be informing the side concubine about this."

Lin Qingyu sneered and said, "You better not miss a word."

Back at the Blue Wind Pavilion, Huan Tong took the medicine and went to the small kitchen to make the medicine. When Lin Qingyu entered the bedroom, Lu Wancheng was already sitting up.

Lu Wancheng was having a hard time getting out of bed now. He asked the carpenter to make a small square table that could be placed on the bed. His hands were shaking so badly that he had to hold the wrist of his right hand with his left hand in order to barely be able to continue to write.

Seeing Lin Qingyu coming, Lu Wancheng put down his brush and said with a smile, "Ah, my Lao Po is back."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

The word "Lao Po" in Dayu meant an old woman. Lin Qingyu really didn't know why Lu Wancheng called him that but he knew that Lu Wancheng had no malicious intentions, and he was extremely happy every time he called him that. Perhaps in Lu Wancheng's hometown, "Lao Po" had other meanings; for example, it could refer to friends and confidants.

Thinking of Lu Wancheng's half-dead appearance when he was poisoned, Lin Qingyu tacitly allowed him to call him that once or twice occasionally. "Did

you see Zhang Shiquan?"

"En, I saw him."

"What did he tell you?"

Lu Wancheng coughed twice and said, "He just gave me his greetings."

Lin Qingyu sat down on the side of the bed and saw that Lu Wancheng had drawn a strange symbol on the paper: an arc was embedded in a circle, and inside the arc was a small circle, like an eye. "What is this?"

Lu Wancheng didn't answer and asked, "Qingyu, do you know what people who play with substitutes have in common?"

Lu Wancheng had told him this question before: "They like holding themselves cheap."

"That's one." Lu Wancheng said, "Another is that these people who play with substitutes will definitely fall in love with one of the substitutes in the end and

when they fail to get their love, they will persistently pursue repentance. These substitutes often have the surnames of the Chen, Chu, Bai, Xie…"

Lin Qingyu was glad that Lu Wancheng had met him. Aside from him, who could possibly understand Lu Wancheng's inexplicable words? "Do you mean that Xiao Cheng will fall in love for real with a substitute?"

Lu Wancheng smiled and said, "How smart."

Lin Qingyu recalled: "Chen, Chu, Bai… Chen Huaishi?"

Lu Wancheng was surprised. "How did you know?"

"You wrote that name."

Lu Wancheng snorted and said in admiration, "This is simply too clever."

"So, who is this Chen Huaishi?" Lin Qingyu asked, "Is she a concubine of the Eastern Palace?"

"No, he's a man. He's Xiao Cheng's shadow guard." Lu Wancheng stared at the pattern on the paper, his lips turned white. "He's often hidden by Xiao Cheng's side. Maybe he has already seen us."

Lin Qingyu saw the signs of Lu Wancheng's poison acting up and said calmly,

“Let’s not talk about this for now. Just lie down and rest.”

At this moment, there was a sudden noise from outside——

“The Eldest Young Master needs to rest. Third Young Master please come back some other time.”

“Go away!”

“If the Third Young Master wants to force his way in, this servant can only—ah!”

Lin Qingyu stood up. “It’s Lu Qiaosong, presumably here for the fleeceflower root.”

Lu Wancheng coughed a few more times and his face was extremely ugly.

Lin Qingyu was about to call someone to drive Lu Qiaosong away, but Lu Qiaosong had already strode in. Lin Qingyu stood in front of Lu Wancheng’s bed and raised his eyebrows coldly. “Leave.”

Lu Qiaosong’s face was morbidly sinister. His previous dashing-ness could no longer be seen. Even his temperament had become twisted. He pointed to Lu Wancheng and put on a fake smile. “With him like that, no matter how much

medicine he drinks, it's no use! Why does he still contend with me for medicine? Don't tell me he can still leave heirs for this family!"

Lin Qingyu ignored him. "Servants!"

Huan Tong came with a few of the servants. "Young Master!"

"Drag him out."

Lu Qiaosong's hands were bound but he still refused to leave. He stared fixedly at Lin Qingyu. "Lu Wancheng already half-dead. How many more days can you be arrogant, Lin Qingyu? After he dies, what can a widowed male wife like you do? When the time comes, you should be sold to the Jiaofang Shi to be played with by all sorts of men. Growing such a beautiful face would all be in vain!"

Lin Qingyu tried his best to suppress the surging malice. Lu Wancheng needed his rest. He just needed to drive this person away. For the rest, it wouldn't be too late to deal with Lu Qiaosong after Lu Wancheng falls asleep.

"Qingyu, I-I don't feel so good. Qingyu…" Lu Wancheng weakly called his name. He suddenly made an "uh" and bright red blood spilled from the corners of his mouth.

Huan Tong exclaimed: "Young Master Hou!"

In an instant, Lin Qingyu's cold brows surged with anger. He roughly grabbed Lu Qiaosong's jacket and slammed him against the pillar. "You're looking for

death."

37

Chapter 36

Although Lu Wancheng was seriously ill, under Lin Qingyu's careful care, there were very few times of embarrassment and he never vomited blood. He couldn't save Lu Wancheng's life, but at the very least, he could let him walk cleanly and with dignity.

Nasty things like blood should never appear on his body.

Lu Wancheng vomiting blood seemed to have turned on the switch for the poison to release. More and more gushed out. After a while, it dyed red the front of his clothes and the brocade quilt. He then fainted.

"Eldest Young Master," Hua Lu cried, "Eldest Young Master, please don't scare this servant…"

"Shao-shaojun, what do we do!"

The servants of the Blue Wind Pavilion had never been faced with this sort of battle. All the servants were flustered, waiting for Lin Qingyu to take charge of the situation.

After Lu Qiaosong hit the back of his head against the pillar, he was sent kneeling to the ground by several servants. He had lost all dignity as a young master. Seeing so much blood, he remembered how he'd done the same all

over that singer that day. His eyes were about to split and his eyes were red as he shouted happily, “Lin Qingyu, do you see? Your husband vomited so much blood. He’s going to die. No matter how good you are at medicine, no matter how many thousand-year fleeceflower root you give him, you won’t be able to save him!”

Lin Qingyu looked at him and suddenly let out a low laugh. That voice carried a chill that pierced through the bone. Paired with his face, there was unexpectedly a sense of bewitching coquettish-ness, sending chills down peoples’ spines.

When Lu Qiaosong came back to his senses, he was “invited” out by the servant of the Blue Wind Pavilion. The curtains in front of the bed were lowered, and only the shadows of the figures behind could be seen.

Lin Qingyu was busy all through til midnight. It could be said that he saved Lu Wancheng’s life. The servants helped Lu Wancheng wipe off the blood and put on clean clothes and bedding. Lu Wancheng lay quiet and peaceful, sleeping, spotless, as if feeling no pain at all.

Lin Qingyu watched him for a while. The main courtyard sent servant to deliver a message, saying that the Madam was asking the Shaojun to come over.

Lu Qiaosong had ran to the Blue Wind Pavilion to make a scene, making his seriously ill brother vomit blood. This was considered a major event in the

house, and even Nan'an Hou was also disturbed. After hearing the ins and outs of the matter, he said angrily, "Where is that unfilial son now!"

Now that the matter had blown up to this point, Liang Shi no longer kept up the pretense of being a loving mother to Wancheng. Making concessions in order to gain advantages, sobbing and sniffling, she said, "Master Hou knows that Wancheng is ill, but do you remember that Qiaosong is also ill?"

"How can his illness be compared to Wancheng's?! He knew that his brother was seriously ill, but he went to the Blue Wind Pavilion to kick up a fuss, spouting insolent remarks. Should he not be punished?"

"Naturally, he should be punished. It's just that after Qiaosong was kicked out of the Blue Wind Pavilion by the servants, he unexpectedly fainted. The doctor said that his body was weak and that he mustn't get angry. Saying so may sound bad but, Wancheng… he is already like this. Does Master Hou really want to punish Qiaosong while he is ill, possibly worsening his condition!" Liang Shi wiped away tears, observing Nan'an Hou's expression, "Master Hou doesn't know but Qiaosong just found a cure for his unmentionable illness. He was too eager to get well, wishing to provide descendants for Master Hou. In his eagerness, he impulsively contradicted his elder brother and his wife. If

Master Hou wishes to punish him, I, his mother, have nothing to say. My only request is that Master Hou wait for him to feel better before punishing him…"

Having no descendants has always been a matter of utmost concern for Nan'an Hou. Hearing Liang Shi say that Lu Qiaosong's unmentionable illness had hope of being cured, he couldn't help but waver. "Is what you say true?"

Liang Shi nodded again and again. "I wouldn't dare deceive Master Hou."

Lin Qingyu watched on with cold eyes, only feeling that these two were wasting his time.

Nan'an Hou glanced at Lin Qingyu and said, "Forget it, let the two of them recuperate first. Other matters will be discussed later."

Lin Qingyu walked out of the main courtyard and Huan Tong immediately greeted him. "Young Master, what did Master Hou say?"

Lin Qingyu sneered. "Were you still counting on him?"

Huan Tong couldn't believe it. "But the Third Young Master made Young Master Hou vomit blood. It can't be that he just plans to let this matter go,

right?”

“Enough.” Lin Qingyu said, “Go and find Zhang Shiquan.”

Lu Wancheng slept for three days before waking up.

Although Lu Qiaosong was spared punishment, he was also warned by Nan’an Hou not to approach the Blue Wind Pavilion and disturb his brother’s recovery. In addition, Nan’an Hou also asked the steward to go to the market to buy some thousand-year fleeceflower root for Lu Qiaosong to use as medicine.

Lu Qiaosong ate the precious medicinal herbs like a meal. Piles and piles of money were spent, but it still didn’t work. By this time, he realized that he might have been deceived by that quack doctor. In a fit of anger, Lu Qiaosong imprisoned the quack doctor in the firewood room of the mansion, threatening him that if he couldn’t think of a way to cure him, he would chop off his hands so that he wouldn’t even be able to carry his bowl to beg for food.

The quack doctor was frightened out of his wits. Who knows whether the emergency brought out his quick-wittedness or what but he actually came out with a prescription. Lu Qiaosong was skeptical but prepared a medicinal pill according to his prescription. After taking a few pills, he really felt that his body had changed. His spirit was excited, his body was hot, and his waist and

legs were also able to get stronger. Lu Qiaosong was overjoyed, thinking that soon, his shameful illness should be cured.

Liang Shi was also overjoyed. The son left by the first wife had only a few days to live. Her daughter was now the side concubine of the crown prince. If her son could be cured and leave descendants for the Hou Mansion, her life would be complete.

The only thing that worried her a bit was that though she had had someone bring news into the Eastern Palace to tell Lu Niantao what has been going on in the mansion, she hadn't gotten a reply.

So, she prepared a generous gift and sent someone to bring it to the eunuch who helped mother and daughter pass word to each other. Unexpectedly, the

eunuch threw the person out, coldly throwing out this sentence, “The Nan’an Hou’s Mansion has truly raised a good daughter.”

When Liang Shi heard these words, she felt very anxious but she couldn’t find out what happened. She wasn’t able to enjoy her comfortable days for long before she began to panic again.

She didn’t know what about Lu Niantao was “good”, but Lin Qingyu knew very well.

Hu Ji brought him news — His medicine had worked.

A few days ago, Xiao Cheng’s head suddenly began to hurt. He had a splitting headache, deafness and pain in his eyes. It made him want to hit his head against the wall. Imperial physicians from the Imperial Hospital gathered in the Easern Palace but after looking for a long time, they couldn’t find the cause. Concubine Chen ordered a thorough investigation into the expenditures of the Eastern Palace; from the food, tea and water to all the clothing, no detail was overlooked. Still, nothing could be found.

At this time, Concubine Chen’s female headservant said that since the problem wasn’t in the crown prince’s palace, maybe it was in another palace?

As a result, the palaces where the two concubines resided were also carefully searched. The incense Lu Niantao used in her palace was found and checked by the imperial physician. But Xiao Cheng was suspicious by nature. Even if the imperial doctor said that there was no problem with the incense, he still

ordered that no one in the entire Eastern Palace should use incense in the future.

Xiao Cheng was no fool. The same trick couldn't be used on him twice. Lin Qingyu knew that Lu Niantao had outlived her usefulness.

Such being the case, he ought to squeeze out whatever value she had left.

Imperial Physician Hu was loyal to his father and he had helped them so much. He deserved something in return.

The cause of the crown prince's headache could not be found. The imperial doctors of the Imperial Hospital were all helpless in the face of this crisis. No one expected that it would be Hu Ji, a newcomer to the Imperial Hospital, who would finally find the cause.

There was nothing wrong with the incense used by the crown prince's side concubine, but if it was mixed with Feng Qiu Huang and Sheng Chazi, it will cause wind-heat syndrome, easily leading to a headache.

Feng Qiu Huang and Sheng Chazi were the special incense used by the Empress and Concubine Chen. The crown prince went to Fengyi Palace and Changle Palace every day to pay his respects. Occasionally, he would go to the side concubines at night.

After the truth was revealed, Concubine Chen was furious. She thought of how the Nan'an Hou's Mansion and the Empress had a relationship by

marriage. She thought that this must have been deliberately done by Lu Niantao and that it was instigated by the Empress. Concubine Chen cursed at Lu Niantao, calling her a ‘ despicable woman ‘ and delivered two slaps to her face. She almost raised this matter to the Emperor but was stopped by Xiao Cheng.

In the Eastern Palace, Lu Niantao grew pale from crying. She insisted that she hadn’t known about it, she only use this incense because His Highness liked it.

Xiao Cheng knew that she wasn’t lying. Lu Niantao counted on the Eastern Palace to support her and her mother. She had no motive to lay a hand on him. Furthermore, it hadn’t been easy for Xiao Cheng to acquire the position of crown prince. Before he successfully ascends the throne, he didn’t want to make trouble with Nan’an Hou.

It was an unintentional mistake on the part of Lu Shi and for the sake of Nan’an Hou’s face, Xiao Cheng did not publicize the matter. He only asked that Lu Niantao move out of the side hall. After that, Liang Shi never heard from her daughter again.

Lu Niantao had completely fallen out of favor, with no possibility of changing her fortunes. If Xiao Cheng dies, she would become a lifelong widow in the

palace. If Xiao Cheng ascends to the throne, she would be nothing but an abandoned concubine in the cold palace.

She couldn't blame anyone. From beginning to end, it was her own choice.

And Hu Ji, who was young and promising, had a bright future. He had earned the appreciation of the crown prince and Concubine Chen, becoming a mighty newcomer in the Imperial Hospital. His future was limitless.

Lin Qingyu had a complete picture of the situation in the Eastern Palace, but when he talked to Lu Wancheng, he only told him the first half: Xiao Cheng had a headache, the imperial doctors were helpless. If this dragged it on, medicines and treatments would be ineffective, even Hua Tuo would find him difficult to treat.

Hearing this, Lu Wancheng said, "Then does that mean I don't need to drink the medicine anymore? The poison is really painful."

Lin Qingyu's chest clenched and he said, "If you don't want to drink, don't drink it."

Lu Wancheng looked at him for a while, then laughed, "This maneuver was truly well done. It is worthy of appreciation – Hua Lu."

Hua Lu brought in a wooden box carved from mahogany. It had five layers and seven to eight drawers, large and small. There were handles on top, holes are

punched on both sides through which strong cloth ropes were passed through – this was a medicine box that a doctor carried on his back when he went out.

Lin Qingyu noticed that there was a strange symbol engraved in an inconspicuous corner of the medical box. It was the symbol that Lu Wancheng drew on the paper last time.

"I asked the carpenter to make it according to the drawings I designed," Lu Wancheng said. "In the future, when you enter the Imperial Hospital, you should carry this medicine box with you when you go out."

Lin Qingyu smiled. "Thank you."

Looking at the smiling face of the person beside him, Lu Wancheng couldn't hold back and said, "They say one should return politeness for politeness. Won't you give me a gift in return?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "What do you want in return?"

Lu Wancheng thought about it seriously and put on a distressed look: "Ah, I still want to see what Doctor Lin looked like in his wedding dress."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

For him, marrying another man as a male wife had been the thing most against his will that he had ever done. Even if the person he married turned out to be

his friend and confidant, it cannot change this. To have him wear a wedding dress again was tantamount to reminding him of the humiliation at that time.

However, if Lu Wancheng really wanted to see it that much, it wasn't impossible for him…

Before he could respond, Lu Wancheng reached out, trying to touch the long hair hanging down on his chest. Maybe he found it dazzling, Lu Wancheng tried several times but failed to catch it.

"Look, you're all tangled about it." Lu Wancheng smiled triumphantly, "I'm joking, can't you hear it?"

"I can't." Lin Qingyu said softly, "You always do this."

Make it so that people are unable to tell true from not.

Lu Wancheng said that he wouldn't drink the medicine but then he still obediently took it as scheduled.

That night, Lin Qingyu watched Lu Wancheng fall asleep. There was a rush of footsteps outside the door, and Hua Lu came running in, out of breath. "Shao-

Shaojun!”

Lin Qingyu raised his hand to signal her to lower her voice. “What happened?”

Hua Lu panted. “Third Young Master… He’s gone.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “What do you mean by gone?”

“He’s dead!”

Lin Qingyu said “oh”. He covered Lu Wancheng with the quilt, and said softly, “I’ve done something bad again, Wancheng.”

38

Chapter 37

Lu Qiaosong died suddenly from a medicine overdose.

It happened too suddenly. At noon, Lu Qiaosong was still in high spirits, with matchless energy, feeling as though he could lift up a mountain. In the evening, blood came gushing from all seven apertures of his head; he lost control over his bladder and rectum. He died in Qingdai Pavilion.

Liang Shi couldn't take such a blow. Upon hearing the news, she lost consciousness. Nan'an Hou only went to Qingdai Pavilion to take a look, after which he then stumbled to the Lu Family's ancestral hall. In the end, Lu Qiaosong's funeral was actually handled by Pan Shi.

Pan Shi had already been preparing for a funeral but she had been preparing it for Lu Wancheng. No one could have imagined that Lu Qiaosong would actually walk in front of Lu Wancheng and that it would be such a tragic way to die too. Naturally, she couldn't use the things she'd prepared for Lu Wancheng so Pan Shi had to have people purchase the supplies at the last minute. They had to make do with what was available for a lot of the things.

There were mourning flags hung in the Nan'anhou Mansion. Paper money wafted in the wind. Lu Qiaosong's coffin was placed in the main hall. Liang Shi, dressed in plain white mourning clothes, knelt down in front of the coffin.

Her eyes though, were empty; her expression, numb. Her tears seemed to have dried up.

Although Lu Qiaosong died disgracefully, he was, after all, the son of the official wife. During his life, he had created a wide network of contacts; he had everything going his way. A lot of people came to offer their condolences. Among them was an unfamiliar man who claimed to be a eunuch of the Eastern Palace, who came to kowtow to the Third Young Master in place of the side concubine.

Finally, Liang Shi's face showed some reaction. She asked in a hoarse voice, "The side concubine… Is she, is she doing well?"

The man showed signs of hesitation. Under repeated questioning from Liang Shi, he told her that Lu Niantao had been confined in the cold palace by the crown prince.

Liang Shi was stunned for a long time. Her eyes fell on Lin Qingyu and she suddenly shrieked, her whole body quivering all over. She pointed at Lin

Qingyu's face and said hysterically, "Evil monster…the Nan'an Hou's Mansion married a monster into the family!"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Madam must be joking. At the beginning, wasn't it you who said that I'm the Mansion's lucky star?"

Liang Shi's eyes widened. As if someone was strangling her throat, she kept spouting weird nonsensical words.

Liang Shi went completely insane. The doctor said that she was suffering from hysteria and that she will probably never be able to recover. Nan'an Hou suffered one blow after another. He was exhausted both mentally and physically; he took to his bed and remained there. He no longer had the energy to look after the family's affairs so he simply let the servants look after his wife, warning them against letting her run out and making a spectacle of herself. All other things were left to Pan Shi to take care of.

Lu Wancheng's body improved a little during Lu Qiaosong's funeral. However, it meant only that he was awake a little more and that he was able to speak for a while.

After learning of Lu Qiaosong's sudden death, Liang Shi's insanity and Nan'an Hou's bedridden condition, Lu Wancheng wasn't the least bit surprised.

Instead, he looked at Lin Qingyu in admiration and said, “Qingyu, you seem to have become even more good-looking.”

It was like a long-dormant highly-poisonous flower finally blooming, frighteningly beautiful. With just one look, it sent a person’s soul astir.

Lin Qingyu looked down at his clean and flawless hands, with a bit of accusation in his tone: “You made me like this.”

Lu Wancheng laughed softly and said, “This is my honor.”

The sound of a suona horn came from outside. It was the person from the Xiong Si, sending Li Qiaosong off to the Western Pure Land of Ultimate Bliss.

The two were silent for a while. Then, Lu Wancheng suddenly asked, “Qingyu, where do you think Lu Qiaosong will go?”

“When a person dies, naturally there is nothing left. Where else can they go?”

“Then do you know how I got here?”

Lin Qingyu was startled and said, “You’ve never told me. How would I know?”

“One day, as I was heading home from school, I rescued a pregnant woman on

the road but lost my own life." Lu Wancheng sighed, "I'm really a good person."

Lin Qingyu's eyes went wide. "You mean, you… died once?"

Lu Wancheng nodded. "A car fully loaded with cargo, ran over me. Don't mention it though, it was quite painful." Lu Wancheng smiled, "They say, retribution is paid out in kind. I saved two people so doesn't that mean that I'm entitled to live twice? Xu Junyuan performed a divination for me. He said, I… may not be destined to die yet."

Lin Qingyu suddenly stood up and blurted out. "How could that be possible!"

Lu Wancheng could no longer pretend to be relaxed, and said in a stern tone, "It's… possible. When I die, I might really die and be reduced to nothing. Even

if I am lucky enough to reawaken, it may not be in here in Dayu or it might not even be here in this world. Do you understand?"

Lin Qingyu stared blankly at Lu Wancheng. After a long time, he asked, "How sure are you of this?"

Lu Wancheng was silent for a long time, and said softly, "I don't know."

Lin Qingyu tried his best to restrain his emotions. "Then what is this for?"

Lu Wancheng seemed to have expected this reaction. He said, voice sinking, "I'm sorry. I hesitated for a long time and in the end, I thought that I should still tell you.

"Why tell me something you're not sure about?!" Lin Qingyu couldn't bear it any longer. He was ready to lose Lu Wancheng forever, but Lu Wancheng told him that he "may" still have a chance.

What did Lu Wancheng want him to do? Do nothing all day, thinking about whether he died or not, waiting for an answer that he wasn't even sure would come?!

If… if in the end, it was simply a 'possibility', he would rather not have this possibility.

"Wait for me for a year." Lu Wancheng said. He then wondered if a year would be too long. He and Lin Qingyu had only known each other for a year. For

what reason would he ask him to wait for him for a year?

"It doesn't need to be a year, cough, cough—half a year… No, a hundred days is enough." Lu Wancheng said urgently, for fear that his request would be rejected for being too excessive. "If I don't come to you within a hundred days, just treat me as having died. We can agree on a secret signal. If I don't die and

transmigrate to someone else's body, we'll use this signal to recognize each other, okay?"

Lin Qingyu's mouth was twisted. His state of mind was thrown into confusion. He gritted his teeth and said, "Lu Wancheng, you bastard."

Lu Wancheng forced a smile on his face: "Other beauties would at most call their husbands a 'jerk' but Doctor Lin is better. He uses 'bastard' from the get go; truly worthy of being my wife."

"Get lost!"

Lu Wancheng teased, "I can't get lost, Qingyu. My legs are broken."

Lu Wancheng had not only lost his legs, none of his internal organs were intact as well. He would take poison every day, dazed with pain, he could only call out his name.

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes. "Tell me."

Lu Wancheng was taken aback. "Tell you what?"

"The signal."

Lu Wancheng smiled slowly. "Let me think about it." This signal needed to be catchy, easy to remember; one that no one else would know. After some

deliberation, Lu Wancheng said, “Then——if odd, change; if even, remain the same; for the symbol look to the quadrant?”

Lin Qingyu said coldly, “What in Heaven’s name is this? Can’t you say something that I can understand?”

“If there’s anything you don’t understand, you can ask and I’ll explain it to you.”

Lin Qingyu asked him, “What you said just now, what does it mean? What does the word ‘Lao Po’ mean? What does ‘sexuality’ mean?”

Lu Wancheng automatically ignored the last two questions and said, “This starts with the basic theorem of trigonometric functions…”

Lu Wancheng was in the middle of talking with gusto when his brows suddenly wrinkled and he bit his lip. This was a sign of his poison breaking out. Lin Qingyu said, “I’ll go get the needles.”

Giving Lu Wancheng acupuncture could reduce his pain a little. It was a drop in the bucket but it was better than nothing.

Lu Wancheng grabbed him. He shook his head and said, “No need, just stay

with me."

Lin Qingyu sat down beside the bed and let Lu Wancheng lie in his arms.

Lu Wancheng futilely opened his eyes wide. He stared straight ahead, his fingers gripping Lin Qingyu's arm tightly. He asked him with a smile, "Qingyu, the signal… Do you remember it clearly?"

Lin Qingyu covered his eyes with his hand. "I remember it clearly."

"You really only need to wait a hundred days…" Lu Wancheng closed his eyes beneath Lin Qingyu's palm. "Don't wait too long, I will feel distressed."

After the Beginning of Winter, it was the time of Lesser Snow. This year's snow was a lot later than usual. The sky was always gloomy. It seemed that even Heaven wasn't sure whether it would snow or not.

Lu Wancheng spent less and less time awake and whenever he was, it was because of the pain from the poison. In the past, he could sit in a wheelchair and go to the yard to bask in the sun, but now he couldn't even sit up. Save for the bed, he couldn't go anywhere.

At the end of the month, Lin Qingyu returned to the Lin Residence to celebrate Mother Lin's 40th birthday. Seeing that he had come back alone, Mother Lin knew that Lu Wancheng's situation was not optimistic. She was afraid that her eldest son would be uncomfortable, so she didn't ask much. But

Lin Qinghe asked why Wancheng Ge didn't come with him. Lin Qingyu rubbed his head and said that Wancheng Ge would come next time.

Mother Lin preferred the quiet over the bustle and excitement. In addition, her husband was away. And so, she simply made some dishes that her sons liked and spent her birthday quietly with her children. She looked at the cloudy sky outside the window and said, "When the snow falls, it'll be time for your father to return home."

Lin Qingyu didn't dare to be away from the Hou Mansion for too long. After having lunch with Mother Lin, he returned to the Hou Mansion. Back at the Blue Wind Pavilion, Lin Qingyu saw Hua Lu humming a little song in the yard watering the withered osmanthus tree. He asked, "Why are you so happy?"

Ever since Lu Wancheng vomited blood, the entire Blue Wind Pavilion has been bleak and gloomy. He hasn't seen Hua Lu looking so pleased in a long time.

Hua Lu happily said, "Young Master Hou just woke up. He's in a good mood today. He managed to sit up by himself and drank half a bowl of porridge in one go. He even had me change him into red festive clothes. Shaojun, do you think the Young Master is getting better?"

Lin Qingyu was stunned for a moment and then his heart suddenly sank.

Chapter 38

Lin Qingyu came to the door of the bedroom. It had been left open.

For his trip back to the Lin Residence today, he hadn't brought along Huan Tong. Huan Tong was squatting beside Lu Wancheng's wheelchair, covering his legs with a blanket. Huan Tong had grown experienced and knowledgeable after following him for so many years. Seeing that Lu Wancheng's vigor was

unusually good today, he wasn't overjoyed like Hua Lu. He merely forced himself to put on an air of cheerfulness as he talked to Lu Wancheng.

"What would Young Master Hou like to eat tonight? I'll have the kitchen make preparations."

Lu Wancheng thought about it and said, "I want to eat plum cake."

Huan Tong said in a hoarse voice, "Alright."

"What time is it?" Lu Wancheng asked, turning to the direction of the wardrobe.

Lin Qingyu followed and looked at the wardrobe too but couldn't find anything special.

Huan Tong said, "Shen Shi is over."

"Why hasn't your Young Master come back yet?"

"He should be here soon. Young Master said he'll be back for dinner."

Lu Wancheng kept looking in that direction, a little worried, "Hurry up."

Lin Qingyu withdrew.

In the yard, Hua Lu was still humming a little tune. The tune was brisk and

melodious. She turned around and saw Lin Qingyu standing at the door. She said, puzzled, “Shaojun, why haven’t you gone in yet?”

Lin Qingyu came back to his senses and said, “Hua Lu, lend me your makeup box.”

Lin Qingyu has only ever put on makeup once in his life — on the day he married Lu Wancheng. Because it wasn’t suitable for a man to wear heavy makeup, he was extremely averse to the idea. When he got married, the matron of honor only painted his eyebrows, colored his lips and placed a huadian in the middle of his brows.

Lu Wancheng didn’t care whether he painted his eyebrows or lips. He seemed to just want to see him wearing his bridal attire with a huadian on his brows.

Lin Qingyu looked at himself in the bronze mirror. He suddenly found that he seemed to have lost a lot of weight. He picked up the brush and looking into the mirror, made stroke after stroke to recreate the huadian that had been painted between his brows that day. It was a simple symmetrical huadian. With just three strokes, it was enough to change a person’s qualities. He no longer

seemed like himself, transforming into a wife that relied on her looks to please her husband.

It turns out even a gentleman can make himself beautiful for a friend who understands him.

Then, he took off the plain and simple clothes he had on, putting on the complicated bridal attire, layer by layer. He tied the jade belt around his waist and finally draped the embroidered tasseled cape on his shoulders. He took off the jade crown tying his hair and let his long, fine black hair fall like a waterfall. He picked up the bridal crown, thought about it, and put it back down.

It was already enough. In the end, he was sending him off, not marrying him.

“Young Master?” Huan Tong’s voice came from outside, “Young Master, are you back?”

Before Lin Qingyu could answer, Huan Tong rushed in and was stunned when he saw him.

Lin Qingyu stood up, the back of his wedding dress dragging against the ground. He didn’t have a crown on his head and he simply let his long hair

hang down naturally. When he lowered his head, his hair blocked half of his face.

Huan Tong has never seen his Young Master look like this before — so bright and colorful, so made up; his every gesture was full of amorous feelings. He stayed dazed for a while. Until Lin Qingyu walked in front of him, only then did he slowly come around. “Young Master, why are you…”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Where is Young Master Hou?”

“Young Master Hou thought that Young Master hadn’t come back yet so he said he was going to wait in the yard.” Huan Tong remembered what he was here for and his voice grew choked, “Young Master, Young Master Hou, he-he…”

“I know.” Lin Qingyu was unusually calm. “Have them prepare dinner. Tonight, you and the others don’t need to serve by our side.”

Bridal attire or wedding dresses, were heavy and inconvenient to wear. If you weren’t careful, you might step on the hem. In order to get to Lu Wancheng

quickly, he had to lift up his skirt like a woman, walking through the silent corridor, quickly reaching the courtyard——

Lu Wancheng, dressed in bright red clothes and a snow-white fox fur cape, sat in his long unused wheelchair that had been empty for a long time. Like a red plum in the snow, spectacularly rushing into the viewers' eyes.

Today, Lu Wancheng was in high spirits. His cheeks and lips were rosy, his eyes were bright. He carried with him that faint youthful vigor, as though he had gone back to this year's warm spring. At that time, Lu Wancheng didn't

have to sit in a wheelchair; he had even overestimated himself, trying to carry him.

If… if the clothes on Lu Wancheng's body weren't that loose and if his legs still retained feeling, he might have also thought that Lu Wancheng really was getting better.

Lu Wancheng just sat there, waiting for him to come.

Lin Qingyu opened his lips. "Wancheng."

Lu Wancheng's reaction was a little sluggish. He was stunned at first. Then, he turned his head slowly, looked at him and smiled, "You're back."

It was no different from his usual reaction to seeing him.

Lin Qingyu's chest seemed to be hit hard by something.

Lu Wancheng had said so many times that he wanted to see him wearing his bridal attire, with the huadian on his forehead. Why was it that now that he has actually worn it, actually drawn it, he had no special reaction at all?

He raised his hand and tried to touch Lu Wancheng's eyes. His fingertips almost brushed Lu Wancheng's eyelashes, but Lu Wancheng still kept his eyes open, staring at him without blinking. The corners of his mouth were curved, and he smiled very beautifully, "Did you go home today and eat the plum cake

made by Mother-in-law? By the way, have Qinghe's front teeth grown back yet?"

Lin Qingyu's hand froze in mid-air and slowly dropped. "I did have some plum cake and Qinghe's teeth have grown back."

How could he forget? Lu Wancheng's body was now filled with poison. It was normal for anything to happen. How could he forget?

"I asked Huan Tong to have some plum cakes prepared." Lu Wancheng said, "Would you accompany me to eat some more?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. When he heard Lu Wancheng call out "Qingyu" again, he then said, "Alright but It's cold outside, I'll push you back in."

Lin Qingyu pushed Lu Wancheng into the hall. According to the rules of wealthy families, all meals should be had in the hall. In the past, Lu Wancheng was lazy and always had the food brought to him. Later, Lu Wancheng gradually became seriously ill and even when the food was delivered to his bed, he couldn't eat much.

Huan Tong asked the kitchen to prepare a table of dishes and when, eyes red, he was about to withdraw after serving the dishes, Lu Wancheng stopped him, "Is there any wine?"

Lin Qingyu did not allow his patient to drink alcohol. The two have been married for so long and they have never shared a drink. Lin Qingyu said, "Your

body is not suitable for drinking."

Lu Wancheng said, "But, I'm already eighteen years old."

"This has nothing to do with…" Lin Qingyu took a deep breath and took on a normal tone, "It has nothing to do with how old you are."

"What do you mean it has nothing to do with age? Being eighteen means you get to do whatever you want. It's been hard to get to eighteen, how can I just

do nothing…" Lu Wancheng paused and smiled, "Doctor Lin, let me have a drink."

Lin Qingyu stabilized his breathing and instructed Huan Tong, "Go get some wine."

Huan Tong poured wine for the two of them and whispered, "If the two Young Masters need nothing else, I will retire first." He was afraid that if he stayed any longer, he wouldn't be able to stop himself from bawling.

Lu Wancheng said, "If you go, who'll serve me dinner?"

Huan Tong looked helplessly at Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu said, "I will serve you."

Lu Wancheng was slightly dazed. Pretending to be surprised, "How nice of you?"

Lin Qingyu served Lu Wancheng a bowl of soup. He brought the spoon to his mouth. "Open your mouth."

Lu Wancheng opened his mouth obediently and carefully took a sip of the soup. He showed a satisfied expression. "One more sip."

After eating a few mouthfuls of food, Lu Wancheng said that he wanted to drink. The wine had been warmed in advance and Huan Tong had specially

chosen the milder pear wine. This wine goes down smoothly and its aroma lingers for a long time. Lu Wancheng took a sip and said, “This is good wine.”

He said so even though he clearly couldn’t even taste the bitterness of his medicine anymore.

Lin Qingyu turned his head and couldn’t bear to look at him. He heard Lu Wancheng ask him, “Qingyu, is this the kind of wine that we drank when we got married?” Before Lin Qingyu could answer, he said to himself, “Don’t tell me you drank the nuptial cup with the rooster as well.”

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes. “I… don’t remember.”

Lu Wancheng said, “Then treat it as though you drank it with me.”

Lin Qingyu restrained his emotions and opened his eyes again. The night outside the window was getting darker. Without him noticing, light snow had begun to fall. Fluttering, snowflakes fell to the ground; the snow and the moon were all entirely white.

This was the first snow of winter.

Lin Qingyu felt a hint of joy in his heart. He remembered that Lu Wancheng had said that he wanted to see him standing in the snow, holding an umbrella,

his cheeks dyed red by his clothes. “Wancheng, it’s snowing outside, do you want to go and…” The word “see” was stuck in his throat. He couldn’t say it.

“It’s snowing?” Lu Wancheng didn’t seem to notice that Lin Qingyu was acting strange. His tone was light, “Then I’m quite lucky. Let’s go and enjoy the snow.”

Lin Qingyu had dismissed the servants in advance. They were all waiting in their own rooms. No one saw him standing in the snow in his bridal attire, holding an umbrella with his long hair cascading down.

No one… saw.

Lu Wancheng stretched out his hand and let the soft white snowflake fall on his palm. Away from the light of the room, his face quickly dimmed. His lips

lost its rosy color and only his eyes remained bright. It was like a short-lived flower, withering quickly after trying to bloom.

…Too brief, so frighteningly brief.

Lin Qingyu didn't know how to make his bloom last longer. He could only hold his cool hand in vain. "Is it cold?"

Lu Wancheng shook his head and suddenly asked him, "Qingyu, do you still like women?"

Lin Qingyu's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. He said, "Naturally."

Lu Wancheng nodded and said with a smile, "That's good."

Lu Wancheng stared at the snow for a while, his eyes half-open, half-close. "Qingyu, I'm a little tired."

Lin Qingyu's heart felt empty and he said softly, "If you're tired, then sleep."

When you fall asleep, you'll be relieved. You'll no longer have to suffer from the pain of sickness and poison.

But Lu Wancheng didn't listen to him, stubbornly opening wide his eyes. He smiled, embarrassed, "I'm sorry, Qingyu. I don't think I can hold on anymore.

But I've worked really hard. Don't be angry."

"I'm not." Lin Qingyu knelt in the snow, holding an umbrella in one hand and holding Lu Wancheng's cheek in the other. His voice soft as water, "I'm not angry."

Lu Wancheng had probably already seen that the Eastern Palace affair hadn't gone as they wished. Yes, Lu Wancheng was so smart, he knew everything. How could he not have seen it?

Lu Wancheng smiled under the umbrella, and told him one last joke, "On the day of Xiao Cheng's tragic death, at the family ceremony, don't forget to tell your husband."

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but smile when he heard his words.

Lu Wancheng seemed to sense that he was smiling and kept looking at him. He kept watching him until he couldn't hold it any longer and he finally closed his eyes. "Then, I'm going to sleep for a while. Remember to wake me up."

Lin Qingyu promised him, "Okay."

The snow came down heavier.

No matter how warm Lin Qingyu's hand was, the man's hand still grew colder

little by little in his, so cold that it pierced through the bone.

The north wind brought evening snow, the cold color illuminated them, everywhere was silence.

He was wearing his wedding dress, a huadian on his forehead, just like when he and Lu Wancheng first met.

40

Chapter 39

That night, Lu Wancheng died in front of Lin Qingyu's eyes.

His long lashes drooped; his expression was serene. He wore a festive crimson robe, and his body was clean and clear. One of his hands was held by Lin Qingyu and the other hand was placed on the armrest of the wheelchair, as if he really were just asleep.

His face was unsupported and tilted to one side, the same way it would whenever he dozed off in his wheelchair. Lin Qingyu subconsciously dropped the umbrella in his hand and held up Lu Wancheng's icy cheek.

Without the cover of the umbrella, the snow fell silently on their hair, on their faces, on their shoulders.

The shop assistant from the Xiong Si had told Lin Qingyu the course of the funeral ceremony. He should remember it very clearly, but right now, he was a little at a loss – Lu Wancheng was dead, what should he do?

Huan Tong was really worried and came to the yard to see the situation. He saw his Young Master kneeling on one knee in front of the wheelchair, his bright red bridal attire spread out on the snow, his long hair blocking the side of his face. He held Young Master Hou's hand in one of his and had his other

on Young Master Hou's cheek. Next to him lay an open umbrella as they were slowly covered with snow.

The two were motionless, like statues.

"Young Master Hou!"

Lin Qingyu heard a cry from behind – it was Huan Tong's voice.

Huan Tong was someone he brought from the Lin Residence. Like him, he hated the entire Nan'an Hou Mansion. Who would have thought that he would cry so sadly for Lu Wancheng in the end.

Lu Wancheng was truly capable. Conquering people's hearts in such a short span of less than a year.

Huan Tong knelt in front of the wheelchair, barely able to breath from crying. His crying brought Lin Qingyu back to reality from his blank daze.

Lu Wancheng was dead. Maybe he'd been reborn in some bizarre world, or maybe he really died.

No one could tell him the answer, and he didn't know if he could wait for the answer. But no matter what, he promised Lu Wancheng that he would watch

him go and then live a good life.

He had already done the first half.

Lin Qingyu slowly stood up. He stayed in the same position for too long and when he got up, his eyes darkened for a moment. He almost fell over but in the end, he caught himself. “Don’t cry,” he heard himself say, “Didn’t you listen to what the man from Xiong Si said? If you let your tears drop on him, you won’t even be able to see him in your dreams.”

Huan Tong said, voice trembling, “Young Master…”

Lin Qingyu gradually recalled what the Xiong Si shop assistant had said. He ordered numbly, “Move him into the house and cover his face with white silk. There’s no need to change his clothes. Just place him in the coffin wearing these. Afterwards, you can go and report his death.” He paused, then said, “By the way, you need to carry him on your back. Don’t princess carry him.”

Huan Tong, choking with sobs, nodded, “What about you, Young Master?”

“I’m going to change clothes.”

He wasn’t going to let others see him in his bridal attire, huadian on his forehead. Only Lu Wancheng could see it, no one else could.

Announcing his death, placing his body in the coffin, standing watch over the body… Lu Wancheng’s funeral was carried out in an orderly manner. Lin

Qingyu attended to everything personally. Though the Nan'an Hou's Mansion was tossed about by wind and rain, its situation, strained and difficult, he still arranged a beautiful funeral for Lu Wancheng.

When news came to the palace, the Empress mourned greatly. The child born with the sacrifice of her prematurely deceased sister did not survive past weak crown after all. She also thought of her child, far away in another palace. Even just visiting him was difficult but she had to look on as other people's sons flourished. She was saddened more and more.

The Empress wept secretly in Fengyi Palace. She couldn't leave the palace, so she could only send her trusted eunuch to go to the mansion to offer her condolences. The Emperor was sympathetic to his minister. He bestowed a lot of things to Nan'an Hou and allowed him to stay at home to recuperate, even going so far as to temporarily transfer his responsibilities at the Ministry of Revenue to the Crown Prince to handle.

Wen Guogong and his wife were also in tears when they learned that their grandson had passed away. They were both old and couldn't bear to watch this heart-breaking scene. So they chose a few capable stewards to help their grand daughter-in-law handle the funeral. They knew that their grandson cared about this grand daughter-in-law of theirs, otherwise he wouldn't have asked them to send trusted aides several times just because he didn't want him to be dragged into the household affairs.

Aside from members of the Lu clan, most of the condolences came from the court officials and their families. In the mourning hall, the visitors, met the

male wife whose marriage was decreed by the Emperor himself. However, they just saw him, kneeling in front of the coffin in his white mourning clothes, expression indifferent, not a single tear shed from beginning to end. In the middle of the mourning hall, was a big ”奠” character. White streamers fluttered in the wind. The whole scene unexpectedly gave his appearance an eerie sort of beauty.

Within a month, the Nan'an Hou's Mansion suffered the successive departure of the two young masters; the master was laid up in bed and the madam had descended into madness. It was truly unthinkable and it led to a lot of busybodies gossiping about it privately. What was called a 'husband and wife' can only be a man and a woman. For two men to be husband and wife was in defiance of the natural order. Not to mention, with how beautiful the male wife was, how could a sick seedling be able to stand it? No, retribution had come. It could clearly be seen that what the Nan'an Hou clashed with that day was not joy, but disaster.

There was an endless stream of mourners during the day and only at night could Lin Qingyu find some peace. Hua Lu cried as she put the paper money

into the brazier. She cried the most out of everyone in the whole Blue Wind Pavilion.

“What is there to cry about?” Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Didn’t I tell you earlier that he wouldn’t survive the winter?”

Hua Lu had been reduced to a puddle of tears, “But-but… Shaojun, are you really not sad at all?”

Lin Qingyu was stunned for a moment and said, “I’m fine.”

Everything was as he expected. As early as the first time he saw Lu Wancheng, he knew that he wouldn’t live long. He had a year to mentally prepare, what was there to be sad about?

Whenever Lin Qingyu looked at Lu Wancheng’s memorial tablet, he kept feeling that something was off. After thinking about it for a long time, he

finally realized what was wrong. He stood up abruptly and said, “You’re all mistaken.”

“Young Master, what did you say?”

“He’s not called Lu Wancheng.”

Pan Shi and Hua Lu looked at each other. Pan Shi thought that Lin Qingyu had gone mentally confused from lack of proper rest. She persuaded, “Shaojun, why don’t you go back to the room to rest for a while? I’ll keep watch here.”

Lin Qingyu shook his head and repeated what he just said, “He’s not called Lu Wancheng.”

Pan Shi was helpless, “If he’s not called Lu Wancheng, what is his name?”

Lin Qingyu opened his lips, “His name is Jiang…”

His voice came to an abrupt stop.

The crying did not stop, though. It was sad and mournful; intermittent, it made people fed up with it.

Lin Qingyu worked hard to block out these voices. He never forgets anything had has gone through his ears. So long as that person said it, he would

definitely remember it.

He thought about it for such a long time, so long that everyone else had already left and he was the only one left in the mourning hall. However, he still couldn't think of that person's name. He only remembered the nonsense that that person spouted during that Mid-Autumn Festival night:

"My surname is Zhu, and my name is Dazhuang. Besides 'Wancheng', you can also call me 'Big Brother Dazhuang'."

"Okay, okay. I'll stop teasing you. Actually, my surname is Jiang, and my name is…"

Lin Qingyu chuckled softly.

The candlelight reflected on his pale and undisguised face. He slowly put away his smile. After that, there was no other expression.

Like this, he sat in front of that man's coffin; sitting about until daybreak.

The time after Lu Wancheng's death seemed to pass extremely fast. In the blink of an eye, it was already the seventh day after his death.

According to legend, the soul of the deceased will return home on the seventh day to see his relatives for the last time. Only then can he be reincarnated with peace of mind. During the night of the seventh day, family members must

avoid staying in front of the coffin; meeting with the deceased spirit in their dreams instead.

Lin Qingyu never believed this but he still went to bed early. Maybe it was from overwork during the past few days, he soon fell asleep.

In his dream, he vaguely heard someone calling his name. Though the voice was unfamiliar, the tone was — there was that sound of a smile in its sloppiness. It sounded just like a certain person.

Lin Qingyu suddenly opened his eyes. He thought he would meet Lu Wancheng but unexpectedly, he saw an unfamiliar young man.

The young man was tall, with wide shoulders and long legs. He was wearing exotic clothes Lin Qingyu had never seen before. He had neat short hair and

unrestrained and exquisite facial features. His brows had a lazy, languid feel. He was a handsome man who looked like he didn't get enough sleep.

The young man sat on the ground leaning against the bed. Seeing that Lin Qingyu was awake, he smiled and called to him, "Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu looked at him blankly.

"I didn't lie to you," the young man said with a smile, cheek on his hand. "Aren't I much better looking than Lu Wancheng?"

Lin Qingyu nodded absentmindedly.

The boy asked again, "Isn't my voice better than his?"

Lin Qingyu nodded again.

The teenager grabbed his hand and put it on his lower abdomen. "I'll let you touch my abs."

The boy only wore a thin shirt with short sleeves. Lin Qingyu felt the so-called abs. They were warm and firm, full of vitality and extremely real.

– Is this a dream? Is this person the Lu Wancheng he imagined?

The young man looked at him for a while and sighed, "It wasn't easy getting to meet you again. Why aren't you saying anything? If you don't speak, I'm

leaving."

Lin Qingyu became anxious and grabbed the hem of the boy's clothes. "Where are you going?"

"There is only one road in front of me and I can only go forward. As for where this road leads, I don't know. Do you remember our secret signal?"

Lin Qingyu immediately recited it.

The teenager showed a satisfied smile and stood up. "I should go."

Lin Qingyu also got out of bed, only to realize that the boy was half a head taller than him. "Your name," Lin Qingyu asked eagerly, "What's your name?"

The young man was silent, then suddenly hugged him by the waist. Lin Qingyu was caught off guard and instinctively wrapped his arms around the boy's neck. The teenager smiled happily, "You're so light, lighter than I thought."

This person, wouldn't allow others to princess-carry him, but he himself could princess carry others so easily.

Lin Qingyu wanted to ridicule him. Then thinking about how this person was already dead, how they were in a dream, he swallowed down his words again.

He picked the critical question and asked, “What’s your name? If you don’t tell me, how can I enshrine a memorial tablet for you? ”

The teenager put him back on the bed and knelt down on one knee beside it, just as he knelt in front of his wheelchair that day. “If I can come back, I’ll tell you. If I don’t come back, then treat me as if I never showed up.”

“No, I want you to tell me now.”

The boy ignored him, turned and walked into the night, waving with his back to him.

Lin Qingyu wanted run after him but his feet seemed to have taken root, and he couldn’t move.

“Jiang……”

Jiang what?

Lin Qingyu woke up from the dream to see that the sky was bright and the room was full of hazy clear light.

41

Chapter 40

Lin Qingyu sat quietly on the bed for a long time. For a while he couldn't tell the difference between the dream and the real world. He looked blankly at his

hand, as if he could still recall the feel of the boy's lower abdomen. But no matter how he tried, he couldn't remember the face of the person in his dream.

He only remembered that that man was taller than the Lu Wancheng he was familiar with. He was "handsome", had a better-sounding voice and could easily carry him. And…what else?

His memory of the boy seemed to be covered with a veil. No matter how hard he looked, he could only see a vague outline.

Hua Lu brought over hot water, waiting upon him as he washed his face. He asked, "Did you dream of him last night?"

Hua Lu's eyes turned red again, and she shook her head.

Lin Qingyu slowly closed his palms. "He came back."

"What did the Young Master say to Shaojun?"

Lin Qingyu smiled. "He was the same as before, saying nothing serious. He just said some useless nonsense."

He didn't even want to tell him his name. The bastard. He should be hanged and given a beating.

But even if all he said was nonsense, the atmosphere of the dream had still been warm, making one feel nostalgic. It was a pity that when he woke up

from the dream, there was nothing left.

Lin Qingyu began to collect the things Lu Wancheng had left behind, selecting some that would be buried with him.

There were too many things, so he asked Hua Lu to sift through them first. He picked out the things that Lu Wancheng had used in the past year. Others that were too old could be disposed of at will.

The clothes he'd worn, the jade crown he'd worn, the tableware he had used, the throwing pot he had played with, the books he'd read and…the birds.

During the first half of the year, Lu Wancheng's health hadn't been too bad. He collected a lot of strange things and also raised a Hwamei and Myna. Later, his health gradually deteriorated and both the Hwamei and Myna also died of illness. Lu Wancheng personally arranged the funeral for the two birds, humming a cheerful tune to send them on their way. He said that the tune was called the coffin dance meme and asked him if he wanted to learn it. He could teach him and when he died, he could have the people from the Xiong Si play it on the suona as they carried his coffin and sent him off.

At the time, he didn't feel like paying attention to Lu Wancheng. He simply let him babble outrageous things in his ear and wouldn't even look at him.

Fortunately, Lin Qingyu has a good memory, and even if he hadn't paid attention at the time, he could still recall many details now.

Lu Wancheng liked fun things that didn't require him to move much. One day, on a whim, he said that he wanted to know how the people of Dayu sheared sheep. So he asked the steward to bring a sheep from one of the villages. He then ordered them to shear the sheep in front of him.

"If I were that sheep, I would have died from embarrassment." Lu Wancheng said as he lay on the reclining chair.

This reclining chair was Lu Wancheng's favorite. He liked to lie on it to bask in the sun, swaying slowly, squinting; just like a lazy cat.

Lin Qingyu followed Lu Wancheng's example and lay down on the reclining chair. He picked up a book that he been lying by the side and flipped through it.

He remembered this book, a popular crime mystery novel. Lu Wancheng had circled the murderer's name on the third page, making it so that he couldn't read it any further. He wrote the word "get lost!" in reply to Lu Wancheng and

never revisited this book afterwards. He hadn't expected for Lu Wancheng to actually reply to him in the book.

"This man is the murderer."

"Get lost!"

"In the end, I have unexpected spoiled Doctor Lin's reading experience! I'm sorry, let me kowtow to you in apology."

Lin Qingyu looked at a certain someone's scribbled handwriting and the corners of his mouth curved up slightly.

Lu Wancheng had always been like this — first making people speechless with anger, then quickly and sincerely apologizing, making it impossible to stay angry.

At that time, Lu Wancheng was still a through and through hedonistic son of rich parents — eating and drinking all day long, lying in bed and refusing to

get up. Since when did he start to become deep and shrewd, exhausting his thoughts and ingenuity?

There was a slight dull pain in his chest. Lin Qingyu closed the book. Still, he couldn't shed any tears.

Maybe what he lost was something he should never have had.

In the study, Lin Qingyu found Lu Wancheng's will written a month ago. In his letter, he stated that the dowry left by his biological mother, Wen Shi, was to be left to his widow, Lin Shi, in its entirety. Secondly, he hoped that his grandparents would convey to the Empress that since he had already passed, the matter of their being husband and wife as part of the Chong Xi should stop here. He wished for Lin Shi to be able to return to the Lin Residence and from here on, their marriage should be irrelevant.

When Wen Shi got married, Wen Guogong prepared a very generous dowry. Twenty years later, it has hardly been touched. It was almost comparable to the Lin Residence's entire family property.

In addition, after Lu Wancheng departed, Zhang Shiquan also discussed the accounts with Lin Qingyu. Since taking over the general affairs of the Hou

Mansion, Zhang Shiquan has been quietly transferring most of the Hou Mansion's fields, villages and shops under Lin Qingyu's name.

Lu Wancheng said on their wedding night that when he died, he would let him take his inheritance back to the Lin Residence.

Lu Wancheng hadn't lied to him.

There was only one thing left, which Lu Wancheng hadn't made up his mind on before he died. "Shaojun, Young Master Hou didn't know about the issue of the private salt business in Xuzhou. In your opinion, what should we do now?"

Lin Qingyu originally wanted to use this matter to force Liang Shi to submit. At the same time, after making full use of Lu Niantao, he would use it to make her fall from power – it wouldn't do him any good if Lu Niantao really became a guifei and gave birth to a prince. It was a pity that before he could use it, mother and daughter were already on the point of dying.

Within the span of a year, the Nan'an Hou's Mansion had experienced death, madness, and illness. Their situation was already as precarious as a pile of eggs. Now, he just had to wait for Nan'an Hou to be unable to hold on any longer,

either retiring and returning to his hometown or falling ill and dying. There was no need for him to do anything.

How boring.

“Extricate yourself from this matter completely. Let them continue to make trouble,” Lin Qingyu said, “Maybe it will be useful in the future.”

Zhang Shiquan said respectfully, “Yes.”

“Young Master,” Huan Tong hurried into the room. “The Crown Prince is here. Master Hou says you should prepare to welcome him.”

Both the Emperor and the Empress expressed concern over Lu Wancheng’s death. As the Crown Prince, Xiao Cheng could not neglect this matter. For him to come to the Mansion to offer his condolences in person was considered giving Nan’an Hou face.

Lin Qingyu knew that such a day would come. “I see, I’ll change my clothes and go.”

Nan’an Hou, supported by Pan Shi, was waiting by the gate to receive the Crown Price. Lin Qingyu, along with the other clansmen, stood behind him. Nan’an Hou thought that the Crown Prince would come with his side

concubine when he came to pay his condolences but unexpectedly, only the Crown Prince came.

Xiao Cheng and Nan'an Hou exchanged a few greeting, saying nothing more than polite civilities such as 'I am sorry for your loss.' "I wanted to come earlier to the Mansion to send my cousin off. However official matters have kept me so busy that it is only today that I managed to get away."

The Emperor was getting on in the years and since catching a cold during the hunting party, his Majesty's health has not been as good as before. For the stability of the court, he had to let the Crown Prince assist him. Xiao Cheng even took over the Ministry of Revenue from Nan'an Hou. It could be said that Xiao Cheng was like the sun at high noon, his power and influence was growing.

Nan'an Hou now only had one daughter left so he couldn't help but ask after the side concubine's current situation. Xiao Cheng simply down played the matter. "Lu Shi is feeling unwell and it is inconvenient for her to leave the palace. I shall burn incense for my cousin on her behalf."

Lin Qingyu looked behind Xiao Cheng. The crown prince was away from the palace, but aside from the driver's group, he only brought two bodyguards with him. Given Xiao Cheng's suspiciousness, he would definitely not be so

negligent about his own safety. He must have hidden a lot of his shadow guards in places where others couldn't see.

Nan'an Hou invited Xiao Cheng in. When Xiao Cheng passed by Lin Qingyu, the corner of his lips raised up into a smile that was yet not a smile.

Lin Qingyu was first to look away. It wasn't that he was afraid to lock eyes with Xiao Cheng. He was only worried that if he were to be hit with Xiao Cheng's grease, no one would be able to save his eyes.

The group arrived at the mourning hall. As Lu Wancheng's widow, Lin Qingyu lit six incense sticks and handed them over to Xiao Cheng.

Xiao Cheng took the incense sticks and said in a voice that only the two of them could hear: "Little Qingyu, you've lost weight."

Lin Qingyu had a black expression on his face, as if he hadn't heard.

Xiao Cheng looked at Lu Wancheng's memorial tablet and laughed slowly. "I still remember my cousin once saying that as long as he doesn't say it's over,

nothing will end. But what about now? The person standing in front of Little Qingyu is Gu – is this not considered an end?"

Lin Qingyu's heart moved.

That's right, as long as that person doesn't say it's over, nothing ends.

He cheered up and said, "Your Highness may have heard rumors about me."

"Rumors?"

"I married Lu Wancheng and the Nan'an Hou's Mansion met with disaster after disaster. It can be seen that the matter of having a male wife is not tolerated by Heaven."

"Is Little Qingyu misunderstanding something?" Xiao Cheng smiled evilly, "How could Gu marry a male wife? What Gu wants is only your face."

Lin Qingyu raised his eyelashes, "Your Royal Highness…what do you want?"

"There's no hurry." Xiao Cheng bowed slightly three times to Lu Wancheng's memorial tablet. He looked to be piously burning joss sticks while he said insulting words to the widow of the deceased, "The most delicious prey can only come from a patient hunt."

Lin Qingyu's eyelashes drooped back down. His hand reached into his sleeve, as if to pull out something. A white light flashed in front of Xiao Cheng's eyes.

Before he realized what had happened, a figure came out of nowhere and stood in front of him.

Lin Qingyu felt a sharp pain on his wrist and he was knocked back a few steps, barely able to stabilize his body. He then found a long sword placed against his neck.

A maid keeping watch beside the coffin screamed. Her mouth was quickly covered. The sudden change frightened everyone. They could only see a black-clothed young man in the mourning hall, holding a long sword, radiating awe-inspiring killing intent, looking blankly at Lin Qingyu.

Compared to Lin Qingyu, the young man was extremely ordinary both in appearance and in figure. He was someone who could easily melt into a crowd.

But at this moment, with the slightest move of his hand, the floor would be splattered with Lin Qingyu's blood.

Lin Qingyu whispered, "Shen Huaishi?"

Surprise flashed in the young man's eyes.

"What's the matter?" Xiao Cheng said, displeased, "What are you doing out suddenly appearing out of nowhere?"

The young man said succinctly, "Lin Shaojun has a sharp object hidden in his sleeve."

Everyone took a sharp breath. Assassinating the crown prince was a serious crime that was punishable with death for the entire family and confiscation of all their property.

"Oh?" Xiao Cheng narrowed his eyes dangerously, "Lin Shaojun wants to do something stupid in front of his husband's coffin?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Shadow guard daren has misunderstood." He took out what was hidden in his sleeve which turned out to be nothing but a buyao. "This is something left by Young Master Hou. After Young Master Hou departed, I started to carry it around with me, developing the habit of fiddling

with it from time to time. Unexpectedly, it caused such a misunderstanding. I hope His Royal Highness can pardon me."

Xiao Cheng scrutinized Lin Qingyu. All the other people didn't even dare to breathe too loudly until Xiao Cheng said, "Withdraw."

The young man immediately put away his sword. He lowered his eyes and said, "This subordinate deserves death."

After this small disturbance, Xiao Cheng didn't stay long. Lin Qingyu put the buyao along with the other funeral objects to let it accompany Lu Wancheng in his eternal sleep. Otherwise, Lu Wancheng might have nothing to fiddle with in the other world.

After the wake was the burial. The ancestral tomb of the Lu Family was in Lin'an and Lu Baishuo rushed to the capital from his hometown in order to return Lu Wancheng, this fallen leaf, back to his roots. As his widow, Lin Qingyu should go with Lu Baishuo to send Lu Wancheng off on his final journey.

The New Year was approaching, and Lin Qingyu planned to leave for the south after the New Year's. On New Year's Eve, Nan'an Hou's mansion did not post Spring Festival couplets. They didn't set off any firecrackers and they were not allowed to visit relatives and friends. Although Lin Qingyu missed his parents

and younger brother, in order not to bring down criticism upon them, he still chose to stay in the Hou Mansion for the New Year.

He gave the servants of the Blue Wind Pavilion a holiday and spent the New Year with Huan Tong. Huan Tong cooked them a pot of dumplings and while the master and servant were eating, they welcomed a guest.

Hu Ji was alone in the capital and it was inevitable for him to feel particularly lonely during times when families should gather. He first went to the Lin Residence, where Mother Lin gave him a meal and said that if he had nothing to do, he could go to the Nan'an Hou Mansion for a visit. So Hu Ji came and brought along a few of Mother Lin's pastries.

Lin Qingyu thanked him and asked, "Is Mother well?"

Hu Ji said: "Shiniang is alright. I am more worried about Shaojun and Pan Yuan daren who is far away in Yongliang."

Lin Qingyu frowned. It has been a long time since the news came to the capital from Yongliang. New information has been slow in coming. The battles to the

northwest continued unceasingly. General Gu's fate was uncertain and no one knew when his father could return.

When Hu Ji heard that Lin Qingyu was going south, he said worriedly, "The epidemic is raging in the south. Shaojun must be careful."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "Yes."

Hu Ji stayed with them for a while and then got up to say goodbye. Lin Qingyu saw him out. When he looked up, he saw the sky ablaze with light, the galaxy twinkling down at them.

That night, the year ended and tomorrow, the new year would come.

After that night, the soul of the boy surnamed Jiang never entered his dreams again.

42

Chapter 41

On the third day of the new year, Lin Qingyu took Huan Tong and a few guards and sailed south with Lu Baishuo. From the capital to Lin'an by water, it would take a month at best. He would probably have to spend the Lantern Festival on the road.

Even though this trip was to deliver the coffin, Lin Qingyu wasn't about to treat himself badly. He rented two large two-story boats, one of which was specially used to carry Lu Wancheng's coffin.

It was the Chinese New Year, the time for visiting relatives and friends. There were numerous boats coming and going at the capital's ferry port. They were surrounded by the din of people's voices. Lin Qingyu helped Huan Tong onto the boat. Huan Tong looked at the place where the river met the sky and said with emotion, "A few years ago, Young Master left the capital to travel for his

studies. You also traveled by water for a long time. Now, it's riding boats that I'm most afraid of."

They were in the same ferry, with the same people; it was only the mood that had changed. Only then did Lin Qingyu remember that Huan Tong was prone to getting seasick. "How about you go back to the Lin Residence?"

"How could that be?" Huan Tong said firmly, "Wherever the Young Master goes, I will follow."

The men carried the coffin onto the boat. Before his death, Lu Wancheng would never stand if he could sit; would never sit if he could lie down. He only went out a handful of times a year, feeling exhausted whenever he traveled far by boat or carriage. Lu Wancheng once said he would go looking for

punishment only after he's gone mad. Who knew that even after death, he would still need go on such a bumpy journey with him?

After everything was ready, the boatman raised the anchor and the boat started off.

The tide receded and the river surface was calm and still. Fog covered the surface and the sun shone down on the water, half the river rustled and half the river turned rosy.

"Isn't the river scenery quite nice?" Lin Qingyu wiped Lu Wancheng's memorial tablet and set it down. "If you manage to come back, don't be so lazy in the future and go out for a walk once in a while."

Lin Qingyu wanted to say something else, but when he saw the words "Lu Wancheng's Tomb" on the tablet, he kept feeling out of sorts. Ever since he saw that strangely dressed boy in his dream, he kept having this sense of discordance towards Lu Wancheng's coffin.

Lu Wancheng was already dead, but that person might not be.

Going all the way south by boat, the surrounding scenery was constantly changing — from the plains of the north to the mountains of the south. A few days later, they made a brief stop at Xunyang Ferry.

The epidemic was raging in Hongzhou and their boats would not be able to make their appointed stop there. And so, they had to replenish supplies in

Xunyang, which was a day's journey by boat from Hongzhou.

Lu Baishuo asked Lin Qingyu if he wanted to go ashore. "I heard that Xunyang's tea cakes are a must. Would Lin Shaojun want to try some?"

Lin Qingyu was not very interested and said, "No, I'll be waiting for you on the boat."

"Then I'll buy and bring some back for you." Lu Baishuo said, "Just treat it as a return gift for the 'Hun Yang Mo Hu'…" Lin Qingyu and Lu Wancheng had invited him to eat this dish when he went to the capital before to visit his relatives. "Hiss, look at this mouth of mine."

Lu Baishuo was aware that he had made a slip of the tongue. He shouldn't have brought this up in front of Lin Qingyu. The deceased was already gone and reminiscing about the past will only add to the sadness, especially in the presence of the deceased's wife.

Fortunately, Lin Qingyu didn't have any special reaction. "Then I'll trouble the Sixth Young Master to buy an extra order so that Wancheng can also have a taste."

Huan Tong was so seasick that he wanted to go down to take it easy for a bit. Lin Qingyu said, "That's perfect. Go into the city and look for a Xiong Si. Have

the store make a memorial tablet. It doesn't need to be anything exquisite. Something useable will suffice."

Huan Tong thought that the Young Master was going to set up an extra memorial tablet for Young Master Hou. He asked, "Should I have them engrave the same words on the tablet?"

"No, just engrave…" Lin Qingyu pondered, pondered and pondered again, "Engrave 'Jiang Dazhuang's tomb' on it."

Huan Tong was puzzled. "Who is Jiang Dazhuang?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "A bastard."

The Lu Family's boat stopped in Xunyang for half a day. They passed through Hongzhou and continued south. When they were just a few days away from Lin'an, Lu Baishuo and Huan Tong fell ill one after another.

The symptoms of the two are exactly the same. First, a persistent high fever; followed by vomiting and abdominal pain. Then blisters began to appear on the body soon after. One of their boatmen was a refugee from Hongzhou. With a single glance, he could tell that the two were infected with the epidemic.

"Xunyang is only a day or two away from Hongzhou. Many in the city are those who've fled from Hongzhou. Although the government checks each one before they're allowed into the city, it is inevitable that some of those infected will still make it through. I'm afraid that these two masters caught the disease

in Xunyang." The boatman covered his nose with his hands and kept a distance from the two of them. "Please do not take offense, My Lord, but if you have this kind of disease, you can only resign yourself to fate. If you are unlucky even the Emperor cannot help you."

In the cabin, Lu Baishuo and Huan Tong were delirious from the fever. After only a day of the disease, they could no longer think clearly, the blisters had spread from their bodies up to their necks.

Lin Qingyu wanted to examine the two but the boatman quickly stopped him. "My Lord, you mustn't. This disease is contagious!"

Lin Qingyu opened the medical box that Lu Wancheng gave him and said, "All of you just need to keep away."

Hu Ji had reminded Lin Qingyu about the epidemic and Lin Qingyu had already made preparations for it. However, he just hadn't thought that the epidemic would come so quickly and so urgently. He covered his mouth and nose with cotton gauze and told the rest of the crew to do the same. At the

next ferry stop, he had the others disembark to buy medicinal materials for him, while he stayed on the boat to take care of the sick.

Huan Tong had just finished a round of vomiting and was in a rare state of wakefulness. Seeing that Lin Qingyu was going to give him an injection, he hurriedly said, “Young Master, don’t come in here!”

Lin Qingyu held his shoulders to prevent him from moving, and asked, “Do you trust me?”

Huan Tong nodded, eyes red. “Young Master is the best doctor in the world.”

“Except for Father and Master.” Lin Qingyu said, “I will try some medicines on you. Don’t be afraid, they are all mild medicines. Even if they are ineffective, they will not hurt your body.”

“Young Master can use whatever you want. I believe in Young Master…”

Lin Qingyu applied medicinal powder on the two of them. he personally dispensed and decocted them their medicines. He didn’t have a hundred percent certainty. He could only take things one step at a time, increasing or decreasing medication based on their situation.

When the epidemic broke out last year, he wrote a letter to his teacher. In his return letter, Lin Qingyu’s master wrote down a lot of his views regarding the

epidemic. From them, Lin Qingyu got a lot of inspiration and it was quite useful in formulating the medicine.

Under his careful care, within a few days, Huan Tong and Lu Baishuo's fever subsided. The blisters on their bodies burst and scabbed over one after another and there was no sign of the blisters recurring. The two of them stayed in bed for a couple more days, after which they seemed to have made a complete recovery. They gained a lot of scars on their bodies but fortunately it didn't wound their faces.

Lu Baishuo was filled with gratitude towards Lin Qingyu and he immediately called him his second parent. Lin Qingyu said, "Forget about claiming me as a second parent. If possible, may I ask Sixth Young Master to find someone to send a letter back to the capital for me? Give it to Imperial Physician Hu, Hu Ji."

He had written down in the letter all the prescriptions he had used on the two of them, hoping to help the Imperial Physician's Office.

With such a delay, they could only celebrate this year's Lantern Festival on board the boat. The boatman parked the boat at the ferry crossing by the city gate and Lin Qingyu climbed up the second floor. Atop the river's waves, they could vaguely see the fiery trees and silver flowers of the city. It was dazzling,

reminding him of the smile in the eyes of that person whenever he looked at him.

“Young Master, hurry! Look!”

Lin Qingyu looked in the direction Huan Tong was pointing and saw lotus lanterns flowing downstream from the city; floating on the river, like stars. Lin Qingyu watched for a while and said, “Do we still have wine?”

On the other side, Lu Baishuo woke up after a nap. Seeing neither servant nor master of the Lin Family, he went on deck to look for them. Amidst the frosty moonlight, a man in white was seated facing the wind, his long hair, tied with

silk, fluttering like ink; his clothes as pristine as snow. His image, as he raised his face to drink the wine, was far more beautiful than the moon.

For a while, Lu Baishuo thought he had seen an immortal. It was only when the boatman, seeing him in a daze, called out aloud, “My Lord” that he came back to his senses.

“Doctor Lin.”

Lin Qingyu’s hand holding the wine cup paused. He suddenly got up and looked back. The moment he saw Lu Baishuo, the light in his eyes quickly dimmed.

Lu Baishuo was a little embarrassed and at a loss. “Doctor Lin?”

Ever since he had learned of Lin Qingyu’s medical skills, Lu Baishuo felt that the title “Doctor” was more suitable for him than “Shaojun”. They had truly

wasted talent the day Lin Qingyu married into the Hou Mansion as part of the Chong Xi.

Lin Qingyu calmed down and said lightly, “It’s nothing.”

On the night of this year’s Lantern Festival, the moon and the lanterns were the same as before.

A third of his 100-day promise to that man had passed.

When they arrived in Lin’an, Lu Baishuo took care of the many matters of the burial so Lin Qingyu needn’t concern himself about it. Once the Lu Family’s branch family learned that their family’s male wife had arrived, they all wanted to come see, creating quite the fuss. It was a pity that Lin Qingyu didn’t give them the chance. He didn’t even enter the Lu Family’s ancestral home, staying instead at an inn outside. He didn’t make an appearance until the day of Lu Wancheng’s burial.

He looked on expressionlessly as Lu Wancheng’s coffin was buried in the Lu Family’s ancestral tomb. The members of the branch family were crying so hard — some of them had never even seen Lu Wancheng’s face. Seeing him so calm, it led to a lot of people gossiping behind his back, as though him not showing the littlest bit of sadness, confirmed the rumors that he was a jinx upon his husband’s family.

However, the one being buried was Lu Wancheng. What did it have to do with that one surnamed Jiang? The person surnamed Jiang simply borrowed this

body for a year. Lin Qingyu personally working so hard to look after his funeral arrangements for so long, could already be regarded as him repaying the debt for this person surnamed Jiang.

During the second month, Lin Qingyu finally returned to the capital. Lu Wancheng's funeral had come to an end. It was time for him to return to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion to prepare for the division of the property and the separation from the family.

As soon as Lin Qingyu arrived at the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, Hu Ji immediately came looking for him, excitedly telling him two pieces of good news.

First, his prescription for the epidemic was indeed miraculously effective. After a little improvement by the Imperial Medical Office, it was distributed to all nineteen states of the Dayu.

Second, in the northwest border, General Gu — Gu Fuzhou — suddenly returned from the verge of death, persisting for two more days. During these two days, Lin Pan Yuan finally found a way to dispel this strange poison from Xixia. Now, the residual poison has been cleared from Gu Fuzhou's body. All he needed now was to rest in order to completely recover.

"I heard that after General Gu woke up, he saw the Pan Yuan and claimed him as a second parent, insisting that he be his adoptive father. The Pan Yuan refused many times but it was no use. He could only toughen his scalp and

accept him as an adopted son." Hu Ji said with a smile, "In this way, isn't Shaojun now General Gu's adoptive brother?"

Adoptive brother?

For some reason, Lin Qingyu felt a subtle sense of familiarity in his heart. In any case, both these thing truly were things to be celebrated. After a long time, he now finally breathed a sigh of relief. He said "Since General Gu is safe and sound, shouldn't it be time for my father to return to the capital?"

"It should be." Hu Ji said, beaming. "Lin Shaojun, did you know? When the Emperor heard that the one who came up with the cure for the epidemic is the son of Lin Pan Yuan and the wife of Young Master Hou, he made it be known that he wished to invite you to the palace to meet with him."

43

Chapter 42

A few days later, sure enough, summons from the Emperor came from the palace, ordering Lin Qingyu to come to the palace to see him.

With his relationship to the Empress, Lin Qingyu could be considered as being related to the Emperor. However, having no official position, this time, he could only enter the palace as a commoner.

Hua Lu deliberately chose a dark-colored robe. On Lin Qingyu, it created an image as clear and elegant as the sky after the rain. Lin Qingyu remembered the first time he entered the palace to thank the Empress. Before he left for the palace, Jiang had been very reluctant. When asked why, what did Jiang say?

—"I'm afraid that grease-ball of a prince might take a fancy to you. Oh, aside from the crown prince, you've got to watch out for the Emperor too. Old men like young and beautiful…"

Jiang's words regarding Xiao Cheng had already proved prophetic, was he also going to be right about the Emperor…?

Lin Qingyu said, "I won't be wearing this one. Bring me that purple shenyi."

Hua Lu was surprised. "Is Shaojun referring to the one made last year?" She remembered that Shaojun wasn't fond of purple. At that time, the Young

Master said that this color was so tacky that it hurt his eyes. And so, she quickly placed it on the bottom of the box.

“En.”

“But Shaojun is still within the period of mourning. It would be better to dress plainly.”

“It’s no matter.”

Lin Qingyu put on the purple clothes. However, just looking at his figure and face, he was still extremely eye-catching. It was the most that he could do. There was also the risk of being punished if he were to behave improperly before his Majesty.

Lin Qingyu entered the palace with the eunuch who had come to pick him up from the Mansion. He arrived at Qinzheng Palace on foot.

“The Emperor is currently discussing matters with the Crown Prince,” the head eunuch of the Qinzheng Palace said, “Lin Shaojun, please wait here for a while.”

The eunuch in charge of the administrative affairs of Qinzheng Palace was named Xue Ying. He has served the Emperor for many years, and even the

Empress had to give him some face. Lin Qingyu nodded and said, “Thank you for your trouble, Gong Gong.”

Xue Ying was a veteran in the palace. There were three thousand beauties in the harem; there has never been a beauty that he hasn’t seen. But he was stilled stunned the first time he saw this newly widowed Lin Shaojun. Male homosexuality was quite in vogue in the Dayu and there were several stylish and attractive male attendants within the Emperor’s own harem. However, they were obviously no match for Lin Shaojun. It was simply that the Emperor had good taste and preferred light-faced beauties, like lotuses in clear water. Lin Shaojun dressed so tackily, if it weren’t for his face, how could he ever be worth the admiration of anyone?

Said to “wait a moment” but Lin Qingyu waited for more than half an hour, until finally, Xiao Cheng came out. When Xiao Cheng saw Lin Qingyu, a hint of surprise flashed in his eyes. “Why are you here?”

Xue Ying explained, “Answering His Highness, Lin Shaojun has performed a meritorious deed for formulation the prescription for the cure for the epidemic. The Emperor will personally be rewarding him for his achievement.”

“Oh?” Xiao Chen raised one eyebrow and walked half a circle around Lin Qingyu, “Gu also thought you had nothing but a pretty face. I didn’t expect you to have such a talent. As expected of the one Gu has taken a fancy to… “Xiao

Ting leaned in close to Lin Qingyu's ear, the sound of the tail-end of his words turning up, "Little Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu took a half step back, successfully escaping Xiao Cheng's breath. "I hope His Highness knows to conduct himself with dignity in front of Qinzheng Palace."

Xiao Cheng gave a vague smile. "I am merely greeting my younger cousin. How am I not conducting myself with dignity?"

Xue Ying saw that the atmosphere between the two wasn't right. With a smile on his face, he broke the stalemate, saying, "His Highness may have heard, Lin Pan Yuan has accepted General Gu as his adopted son. Lin Shaojun is very fortunate indeed to have General Gu as an adoptive brother."

As expected of a slick and experienced person of the palace, with just a few casual words, he had managed to resolve the deadlock. Gu Fuzhou had 300,000 troops in his grasp. He was the head of the military and enjoyed great prestige within the army. Jiang once said that before Xiao Cheng fell completely in love with Shen Huaishi, the thing he valued most was his position as crown prince. So long as Xiao Cheng still had brains, he wasn't going to embarrass Gu Fuzhou over a stand-in.

Sure enough, Xiao Cheng restrained the look he directed at Lin Qingyu. "Gu Fuzhou…" Xiao Cheng licked the tip of his teeth. His words laced with deeper meaning, "The Lin Family is quite capable when it comes to finding backers

for themselves. It's a pity that this time may be different. Even if it is Gu Fuzhou, he may not prove dependable."

Having said so, Xiao Cheng left. A little eunuch walked out of Qinzheng Palace and said, "Lin Shaojun, please."

The Emperor was past forty. His health was sometimes good and sometimes bad. Having read reports for half a day and discussed matters with the crown prince for a couple of hours, he was long past the point where he could perform as well he wanted. However, he still wanted to see this Lin Shi who came up with the cure for the epidemic. Generally speaking, Lin Shi's contribution could be compared to Gu Fuzhou — one secured safety within, the other, safety from without.

The emperor rubbed his forehead wearily. He saw a young man in purple walk in and kneel down in front of him. "Your subject, Lin Qingyu is here to see Your Majesty."

"Rise."

Lin Qingyu stood up, his eyes were lowered and he stood in the dim light, as if he didn't dare to look directly at the Emperor. As soon as the Emperor saw his clothes, he didn't bother looking at him seriously. "I heard from the Imperial

Medical Office that you were the one who came up with the cure for the epidemic?"

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and said, "Yes, but this subject was only able to come up with the prescription in a short period of time with the guidance of his teacher."

The Emperor also thought Lin Qingyu too young. Experience and qualifications were important for medical practitioners. "Where is your teacher now?"

"My teacher travels all over the world, he lives in no fixed place and his current whereabouts are uncertain. This subject also doesn't know where he is."

"Your teacher seems to be an otherworldly master. Of course, you yourself are equally outstanding." The Emperor said, "Your father just pulled General Gu back from the brink of death for me and you saved my countless subject. Sure enough, with a father as a tiger, the son cannot be a dog."

"The Emperor bestows undue praise and this subject feels uneasy."

The Emperor didn't want to waste too much time on Lin Qingyu: "You have made great contributions to the ending of this epidemic. Tell me, what reward would you like?"

Lin Qingyu's eyes sparkled and he said, "This subject…wishes to be able to walk freely in the Imperial Medical Office, to work with the world's most

famous doctors, to read all the medical books and make a modest contribution to His Majesty's continued glory."

"Oh?" The Emperor's tone as he said that "Oh" was somewhat similar to Xiao Cheng's. "I didn't expect you to have such an aspiration."

Lin Qingyu didn't want an official position or money. He only wanted the qualification to join the Imperial Medical Office. This made the Emperor regard him with a little bit more respect. "You are a talented person, but you have already married a man as a male wife. It would be inconvenient for you now to uncover your head and show your face."

Lin Qingyu knelt down once again. "Young Master Hou has passed away and this subject has done his duty as his wife. I hope His Majesty may reconsider."

"The marriage between you and Lu Wancheng was originally requested by the Empress. The Empress also mentioned this a few days ago. After all, a male wife violates the ancestral system and the Nan'an Hou's Mansion has met repeated calamity because of it. What the Empress wishes is to let you return to the Lin Residence…" The Emperor thought for a moment and said, "Forget it, one does not question the origins of a hero. I grant you the post of a

seventh-grade doctor. You can now walk freely in the Imperial Medical Office."

Lin Qingyu bowed and thanked him. "Your servant thanks the Emperor for his kindness."

Lin Qingyu walked out of Qinzheng Palace, suddenly wanting to laugh. He hadn't taken the Imperial Medical Office's exam last year but he hadn't needed to wait another three years, having achieved his former ambition this way.

It was somewhat laughably easy.

Since Lu Wancheng's death, his luck seemed to have taken a turn. He had wealth and riches; he has regained his freedom; for some inexplicable reason, he now also has a powerful and influential adoptive brother and finally he has

joined the Imperial Medical Office, which he has been aspiring to for a long time.

Was it… was that person's soul blessing him from somewhere?

"Congratulations to Imperial Physician Lin." Xue Ying said with a smile, "In the future us servants will be under Imperial Physician Lin's care."

Lin Qingyu smiled: "Eunuch Xue is being polite. It is me who is in need of your care."

With an in to the palace, his hand could finally reach the Eastern Palace.

Lin Qingyu followed the eunuch who was leading the way out of the palace and happened to meet Hu Ji who was about to return to the office after performing his duties. The two walked out together. Hu Ji heard that Lin

Qingyu had been promoted to a doctor of the seventh grade and said with joy, “Then Imperial Physician Lin and I will be colleagues in the future.”

“It appears so.”

“By the way, has Imperial Physician Lin heard about this amusing thing regarding General Gu?”

Lin Qingyu saw that Hu Ji’s expression was a little weird. He seemed to want to laugh but felt that he shouldn’t. Lin Qingyu asked, “What?”

“I just met Xiao Songzi who was serves tea in Qinzheng Palace. It was he who told me about this amusing matter.” Hu Ji wondered, “It can’t quite be considered simply amusing. His Majesty is worried about this.”

Hu Ji had been promoted by Concubine Chen and the Crown Prince. He now held a certain position within the Imperial Hospital. In terms of qualifications, he could already diagnose and treat the Empress and the Imperial concubines. But he was still the same as before, with no air of haughtiness about him at all. Whether it was the eunuchs, the palace maids, the guards, or the wet nurses, as long as someone seeks medical treatment, he will try his best to cure them.

In the palace, the life of a servant was of little value. Hu Ji’s only intention was to cure sicknesses and save patients, but along the way, he has inadvertently won over the hearts of many of the palace’s residents. Therefore, he was very

popular in the palace and even the people around the Emperor were willing to reveal to him information that weren't considered confidential.

If the word "amusing" could be used to describe it, it definitely wasn't anything important. It was probably a joke some brainless concubine in the harem, competing for favor, made. Lin Qingyu didn't care much and asked casually, "What's is it?"

"Today, the deputy general of the Zhengxi Army, General Zhao, Zhao Mingwei's report was sent to the Emperor's desk."

The Zhengxi Army, the Dayu's army that was fighting against Xixia in Yongliang. According to the Dayu's military law, the troops weren't allowed to make any private contact with the outside world. Even when the situation was serious, they couldn't even write to their families lest any of the military's plans be leaked to the enemies. Violators, regardless of their status, would be dealt with according to military law. It could be said that the only connection between Yongliang and the capital were the reports delivered to Qinzheng Palance. If Lin Qingyu wanted to know news about his father, he could only rely on Hu Ji to ask the eunuch of Qinzheng Palace.

"Has something unforeseen happened in Yongliang?"

Hu Ji knew what Lin Qingyu was worried about and said, "Imperial Physician Lin, don't worry. The Zhengxi Army under the leadership of General Gu

defeated the Xixia Army not long ago. Pan Yuan daren is most assuredly safe. General Zhao's report was a request to impeach General Gu."

General Zhao has followed Gu Fuzhou for many years. He was loyal and devoted to him, his respect for him as high as a mountain. Why would he suddenly request for his impeachment, especially just after a great victory? "On what grounds is he requesting General Gu's impeachment?"

At this, Hu Ji couldn't restrain a smile. "He said that General Gu loves to dawdle in bed too much, that getting him to discuss military matters in the morning is nothing short of a disaster. In the end, the generals had to discuss important military affairs in front of his bed. General Gu also hated it when the discussions dragged on for too long. He told them to wash and go to bed early, saying that only in this way can they replenish their energies. Not long ago, the enemy launched a surprise attack late in the evening and as the soldiers were approaching the city, General Gu, half asleep and dazed, with his quilt wrapped around him, climbed atop the city wall and commanded the army to defend the city. Although under his leadership our army finally won a great victory, it was truly… offensive to the eyes."

Lin Qingyu: "…what are all these? What did the Emperor say?"

"His Majesty has yet to make an Imperial judgement. Moreover, General Gu himself has also sent in a report. He said that due to his poisoning and his close brush with death, he has grown disillusioned by the mortal world; that his body and mind were no longer as they were before and that he can no longer fight the enemy at the front lines for the Dayu. To let him continue to

command the three armies, would at best delay military planning and at worst, endanger the people. He is now a 30 year old 'elder' and he hopes not to ruin his integrity in his later years. He hopes that the Emperor will look kindly upon his years of hard work and allow him to return to the capital to lead the life of an idle rich man." The more Hu Ji said, the more inconceivable he found everything to be. Of course, these weren't the original words written by Gu Fuzhou in the report. Xiao Songzi of Qinzheng Palace added his personal style when he recounted it to Hu Ji, but the general meaning was not wrong. "General Gu also recommended General Zhao to take over the post of General of the Zhengxi Army. He repeatedly begged the Emperor to allow him to return to the capital immediately."

Gu Fuzhou joined the army at the age of fourteen, and Lin Qingyu was only four years old when he became famous at the age of sixteen. It could be said that Lin Qingyu grew up listening to Gu Fuzhou's deeds. Although he had entered the medical field, when he was young, he too yearned to go to the battlefield to chop down their enemies and win glory. There weren't many people who managed to earn his admiration and respect; Gu Fuzhou was one of them.

What Hu Ji said wasn't at all like something a proper general would say.

Lin Qingyu was silent for a long time. He couldn't help but say, "This person that you're talking about is really General Gu — Gu Fuzhou?"

Hu Ji said, "Pan Yuan daren once said that if a person has personally experienced walking the line between life and death, it is not uncommon for

them to change their temperament after being lucky enough to survive. Perhaps General Gu really has had a realization and wishes to return to the capital to live in ease and comfort."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Perhaps."

Chapter 43

After receiving the emperor's appointment, Lin Qingyu did not delay a second longer. He returned to the Hou's Mansion and began to pack up, preparing to formally draw a line between him and the the Nan'an Hou's Mansion.

When he married, he only brought clothes and medical books. Later, he added one Huan Tong. All these he would be taking away now that he's leaving. The rest was family property he and that person snatched away together. — The silver was stored in the bank and exchanged for silver notes; the antiques, calligraphies and paintings, the deeds to the farmlands, shop and houses, as well as what was left of Wen Shi's dowry, he all took with him.

Several stewards have been making an inventory of all the items for the greater part of the day but still couldn't finish. There were simply too many things. As Lin Qingyu watched them pack the things in boxes, a sense of satisfaction at having exacted revenge rose in his heart.

Naturally, he had no need for so much money. Neither of his parents were extravagant people, and he himself didn't have of anything to spend the money

on. But he would rather give all this money to the roadside beggars than leave it to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion.

These riches were given to him by that person. Why wouldn't he take them?

Pan Shi had been handling matter for Lin Qingyu the entire time. She has been in charge of the household for so long, naturally, she knew about the family property. She watched as the Blue Wind Pavilion was practically emptied, as the greater part of the warehouse's contents were taken away. She remained silent. At this moment, this branch of the Lu Family has withered, the incense burning in front of the temple has been severed. There was only one proper master left in his enormous Hou Mansion. No matter how much money there was, what was the use? She has dismissed the servants who had served Liang Shi and her children before and it didn't cost much to keep the rest. In the end, Lin Qingyu didn't completely empty out the Hou Mansion. He left behind

some fields and shops for them. Even relying on just these, it was enough that she would never have to worry about clothes and food her entire life.

On the day Lin Qingyu left, Pan Shi went to the Blue Wind Pavilion to see him off.

“Shaojun… No, I should call you Imperial Physician Lin.” Pan Shi smiled gently, “I wish Imperial Physician Lin all the best in the future. May you be a famous doctor like Lin Yuan Pan who practices medicine to help the people.”

This might be a bit difficult. With his pettiness and vindictiveness, how was he to become someone like his father?

“Thank you.” Lin Qingyu said, “I shall let Zhang Shiquan stay at the Hou Mansion. He may be of much use to you. If you do not find it disagreeable, you can let him continue to help you with managing the household.”

Eventhough he was leaving, he still wanted to keep one hand within the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion. The Nan’an Hou has served the emperor for many years, he may still be worth using.

Pan Shi might have seen through his deeper meaning but she didn’t say a word, merely nodding her head.

Pan Shi was an obedient and smart person. Lin Qingyu did not find it repulsive to work with such a person. Seeing that Pan Shi had lost a lot of weight, that wrinkles had begun to appear at the corners of her eyes, he spared

her a rare few more words, “As I remember, you were sold into the Hou Mansion back then?”

Pan Shi said, “Yes. Back then, after my mother departed from this world, I was left all alone. Even had I not entered the Hou Mansion as a concubine, I would have ended up serving as a slave or maid to another rich family.”

“If you also wish to leave the Hou Mansion, I can help you find a way.”

Pan Shi was momentarily stunned. Her grip on the silk handkerchief in her hand tightened.

Seeing that she didn’t immediately agree, Lin Qingyu figured he already knew the answer. “Or do you wish to continue looking after the Nan’an Hou?”

“I…” Pan Shi sighed faintly. “I have been in the Hou Mansion for more than ten years. This is my home. If I leave, where else could I go?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Since I would be helping you leave the Mansion, I would, of course, make sure that your life worse in the future won’t be any worse that it is now.”

Pan Shi shook her head and smiled bitterly. “This concubine deeply appreciates Imperial Physician Lin’s kindness. It is just that Master Hou is my husband, after all. How can a woman leave her husband?”

Lin Qingyu disagreed. “There is no such thing as being unable to separate from

someone. Even more that there is no such thing as one being unable to live without another." He glanced in the direction where the memorial tablet was enshrined and said indifferently, "One simply needs to get used to it."

Just like how he was now; was he not living well?

Pan Shi didn't want to leave, but Hua Lu knelt down and begged Lin Qingyu to take her away with him. Hua Lu was originally a maidservant given by Wen Guogong to Lu Wancheng; she didn't have any attachments towards the Nan'an Hou's Mansion. Lin Qingyu's original intended was to let her return to the Guogong's Mansion, but she herself wanted to stay by Lin Qingyu's side.

"Before Young master Hou left, the one he was most worried about was Shaojun. Hua Lu promised Young Master Hou that she would serve the Shaojun with all her heart, that after he departs, she would urge the Shaojun to

eat well and sleep well." Hua Lu's eyes were red; with tears in her eyes, "I beg Shaojun to take Hua Lu with you!"

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly. "Did he say that?"

That Jiang thought that as soon as he left, he wouldn't eat or sleep well. He really thought too highly of himself.

Hua Lu nodded, "Shaojun, just accept Hua Lu, please!"

Lin Qingyu said, "Tomorrow, I will send someone to the Guogong's Mansion to get your deed of indenture."

Hua Lu was both surprised and overjoyed. "Thank you, Shaojun!"

"You have now become a member of the Lin Residence. From now on, there is no need for you to call me 'Shaojun'."

Hua Lu nodded like pounding garlic. "Thank you, Young Master!"

Before leaving, Lin Qingyu finally gave the Nan'an Hou some face and went to seek an audience to bid him goodbye in person. However, the Nan'an Hou was unwilling to see him.

When Lin Qingyu married into the Hou's Mansion last year, Nan'an Hou was still the right-hand man of the Emperor, in charge of the entire Ministry of Revenue. Naturally, he was somewhat well-regarded. But in just a short year,

he had become a hopeless person, with a head of gray hair and a completel apathetic heart. He didn't even know that his family property had been hollowed out. But even if he knew, what could he do?

In the end, Lin Qingyu went to the Lu Family's ancestral hall and lit a six sticks of incense for Lu Wancheng. Among those, three sticks, he lit in place of that person.

After doing this, Lin Qingyu left the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, taking with him with dozens of carts of property, a bunk bed, and that person's memorial tablet.

Walking out of the gate, he turned around and glanced at the solemn vermilion gate of the Hou's Mansion and at the words "Lu Mansion" hanging high above it.

He didn't know if Liang Shi, before she succumbed to madness, and the Nan'an Hou, as he lay in bed recuperating, if they regretted forcing him to marry into the Nan'an Hou's Mansion; if Lu Qiaosong, before he died, and Lu Niantao, as she spent night after night alone at home, regretted humiliating him.

It was only right that they regret. He liked seeing the people who have offended him weep bitterly, regretting their actions.

After leaving the Hou Mansion, Lin Qingyu did not return to the Lin Residence. In the eyes of others, Young Master Hou has been dead for less than three months, his body had yet to grow cold. And yet, that male wife of his has

already requested to leave his husband's house of his accord. Not only was he not abiding by the etiquette of living in widowhood but he was also appearing so blatantly in public. Such utter disregard for etiquette, was he not afraid of being called on by his deceased husband in the middle of the night?

Rumors of how a male wife was inauspicious intensified in the capital. Lin Qingyu may not care about these rumors, but he still had to think about his parents and his younger brother, after all. Even though Mother Lin wanted him to return to the Lin Mansion, he still refused.

Long before going south, he had asked Zhang Shiquan to buy him a three-structured courtyard house in the capital. While it wasn't some grand mansion, it was quite enough for him to live. The house was not too far from the Imperial Palace and the Lin Residence and everything in it was already its proper place. It was simple waiting for its master to move in. The servants were all personally selected by Zhang Shiquan. They were all honest, taciturn and capable in their work. Their backgrounds were also very clean. As soon as

Lin Qingyu entered the door, the steward led them all to shout in unison, “Master, welcome back!”

Lin Qingyu: “…Master?”

Huan Tong burst out laughing. “Young Master is only nineteen this year. Why did you call him ‘Master’? You’re making him sound old.”

The steward explained with a smile, “Master has split from the family and he is now the head of this household. So naturally, he is ‘Master’.”

“You do not need to call me that.” Lin Qingyu said, “You can continue to address me as you have before.”

The servants then changed the way they addressed him. “Yes, Young Master.”

Lin Qingyu enshrined the memorial tablet of Jiang-Somebody in the mourning hall and ordered his servants to look after it; they had to make sure that incense was kept burning morning, noon and night. People were coming and going, busy putting everything in order. He gave scant attention to other

rooms in the residence, however, he had to see to the arrangement of the study and medicine room himself.

Lin Qingyu put the books he brought into the bookshelf one by one. Huan Tong ran to him and asked, “Young Master, where should we put the bunk bed?”

Lin Qingyu thought for a while. “Just put it in the study.”

In the future, if he didn’t feel like going back to the bedroom to sleep, he could spend the night there. He still hasn’t slept in the lower bunk.

At this time, Hua Lu moved in a pot of green bamboo and muttered, “It’s already March, and it’s still snowing…”

“It’s snowing?” Lin Qingyu paused and looked out the window. Sure enough, snowflakes were fluttering outside.

On the first day of the move, Lin Qingyu tidyed up in the study until late into the night. He decided to simply spend the night in the study. He was lying on

the lower bunk, listening to the indistinct sound of the night watch in the distance, one slow and three fast—it was already Sigeng.

This day too has passed.

At the end of last year, that person left on a snowy night like this. Today, seventy days have passed.

Lin Qingyu raised his hand and touched the plank of the upper bunk — Jiang wanted him to sleep well but how could he sleep on such a snowy night?

If Jiang were still alive, he probably would be sleeping better than anyone else.

Fortunately, once this bout of snow was over, winter truly would come to an end.

The last snow of the winter fell for a full three days. Lin Qingyu, dressed in the official uniform of a seventh-grade medical officer, walked on snow inside the palace walls.

Leading the way for him was a little eunuch with delicate and pretty features. It hasn't been long since this little eunuch took up his post. It was his first time seeing such a beautiful doctor and he couldn't help repeatedly looking behind him.

The Dayu's official uniforms were mostly dark colored. This Imperial Physician Lin had a slender figure and a striking face. Dressed in the indigo-

colored official uniform, he look ed even better than the ladies in the harem.

The two were walking when the little eunuch suddenly heard the beautiful doctor call to him, “Gong Gong.”

The little eunuch thought that he’d been found peeking, and said guilty, “Is there anything you need, Imperial Physician Lin?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Is the Eastern Palace far from here?”

“It’s not far.” The little eunuch said, “Go forward and turn left. Walk for half a stick of incense and you’ll be there.”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Thank you, Gong Gong.”

The little eunuch’s cheeks were slightly red. “Imperial Physician Lin is very polite.”

The Dayu placed great importance on the medical field. The Imperial Medical Office and the Imperial Academy were of equal status and they were located on both sides to the northwest of the palace. The government offices and the palace were separated only by a wall. After the students of the Imperial Medical Office have completed their studies, they could pass through this wall and become Imperial Physicians in the palace. Lin Qingyu skipped this step

and became a seventh-grade medical office of the Imperial Hospital by relying on a prescription for the epidemic.

The little eunuch stopped. “Imperial Physician Lin, we have arrived at the Imperial Hospital.”

Lin Qingyu looked at glittering words, ‘Imperial Hospital’. His heart was filled with a tranquility he had never even thought of.

He was finally here.

Walking eastward from the Imperial Hospital for a stick of incense, one would find themselves at Qingzheng Palace, where the emperor handled government affairs and took short rests. At the moment in Qingzheng Palace, the emperor was discussing with the senior ministers and the crown prince about Gu Fuzhou’s resignation.

“Gu Fuzhou sent ten letters in a row, asking me to allow him to return to the capital immediately, as if staying in Yongliang for one more day would kill him. According to Zhao Mingwei, he stayed up most of the night, busily writing these reports!” Emperor livid with anger, “This Gu Fuzhou, who used

to cherish words like gold, is now writing so many words. Just what is he doing!"

After saying so, the emperor waved his arm and threw all the reports on the dragon table to the ground.

The ministesr knelt on the ground. "Please calm your anger, Your Majesty."

Xiao Cheng knelt down with them. The floor was a mess. He saw several of the scrolls roll open. At the end of each report was written: Your servant wishes a speedy return.

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Chapter 44

As early as when Gu Fuzhou's first resignation letter was sent to the capital, the Emperor and his confidants have been discussing the matter. They've been discussing for a long time. Some were of the opinion that since Gu Fuzhou has commanded the army for many years, and has won the hearts and minds of the soldier; if things go on like this, the soldiers might grow to obey only military orders and not the Emperor's. Since Gu Fuzhou himself asked to return to the capital, releasing any military power he had, the Emperor could simply follow his wishes and take the opportunity to take back the military power. It could be regarded as removing a hidden danger to the Dayu.

Another faction, headed by Xiao Cheng scoffed at such a statement. Now that the war in the northwest was at a stalemate, letting Gu Fuzhou come back would only shake the heart of the army and give the enemy an opportunity. Gu Fuzhou was stationed in the northwest border throughout the year. He has won countless victories. Just his name was enough to deter part of the enemy. If Gu Fuzhou was not in the northwest, the Xixia army would definitely take the opportunity to attack the city and capture their stronghold. Let Zhao Mingwei protect it? Was he even capable of that?

The Emperor had yet to make his imperial decision. Gu Fuzhou's resignation letters went from every five days, to every three. In recent days, it came almost daily. At the same time, Zhao Mingwei's impeachment request changed from one every five days to one every ten. He used to insist on impeachment but he

suddenly stopped. He even said in his report: Although the general is very lazy, nevertheless, he is able to lead our army to score one victory after another. It was over, he no longer wishes to get to the bottom of this matter.

While the messenger soldiers were desperately running between the capital and Yongliang, the Xixia army was not idle either. They attacked the city three times within the span of a month. Every day that went without the Emperor's approval of his request was another day that Gu Fuzhou was still the general of the Zhengxi Army. Every time the enemy attacked, he would grumble and swear for a while. Then, he would reluctantly get up from bed, strategized in front of the sand table, and plan victory from a thousand miles away.

What? The Emperor asked why General Gu wouldn't go into battle himself to cut down their enemies? That was absolutely impossible. Let's put it this way, the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear bestowed by the Emperor has long since been gathering dust in the corner; his steed, an extremely rare Ferghana horse, he has overfed and allowed to grow fat, he's even dubbed it a very shameful nickname.

What was puzzling was that Gu Fuzhou could lead them to win every time. And not only to win, but also to win beautifully. There was even one time that while Gu Fuzhou was commanding the city defenses, he dispatched a team of elite soldiers at the same time, taking advantage of the enemy's all-out attack to launch a secret raid on the town where the enemy stored their military provisions. No one knew how General Gu knew that the enemy were storing their provisions in a small town less than a day's ride away. In short, halfway through the siege of the city, news of the stolen provisions suddenly reached

the enemy. They couldn't advance not could they retreat. In the end, they lost their army after having given away a bride.

This was the first time Gu Fuzhou took the initiative to attack after having been cured of the residual poison. Everyone thought that he had reverted back to his old personality. Their highly respected and noble General Gu, who got up early in the morning and worked late into the night, was back. Who would have thought that Gu Fuzhou, having worked hard for only a day, after winning, threw down this statement "let everyone rest for a couple of days and we'll discuss it afterwards" and then lay in bed for two days.

The generals and military officers were confused, heartbroken, filled with bitterness; but they also couldn't help but be convinced. In any case, for the soldiers on the battlefield, the most important thing was to be able to win the battle and keep the number of their casualties and their wounded to a minimum. Only then did Zhao Mingwei write in his report: Forget it, forget it. We no longer wish for his impeachment. His Majesty also shouldn't look into this matter any longer.

Who would have thought that Gu Fuzhou would specially come looking for him after learning of this, saying earnestly, "You can't give up halfway, General

Zhao. Ninety li is merely half of a hundred li journey. You may be successful in your impeachment if you just send over another report."

Zhao Mingwei said, embarrassed, "The general has led us to win so many times. Although the methods used are very different from before, what matters is that we won. We don't have any high requirements."

Gu Fuzhou looked at him reproachfully, and said, hating iron for not becoming steel, "You're hopeless! Don't you want to push me aside and take the position for yourself?"

Zhao Mingwei let out a long sigh and cupped his hands before his chest in obeisance. "General Gu is a person of outstanding ability and wisdom. I am ashamed of my inferiority. It is only right that you should remain as chief general."

Gu Fuzhou almost vomited blood. "You…can't…do this…to me."

When the good news reached the capital, the Emperor decisively rejected Gu Fuzhou's resignation. Don't be fooled by Gu Fuzhou's insistence that he no longer wanted to fight this war, that he wanted to go back to the capital to retire; if forced onto the battlefield, he would still win the battle for everyone to see. Such being the case, then let him continue to stay in Yongliang. The Emperor also specially decreed that the Lin Yuan Pan should stay by his side to

ensure that the general was safe and while he was at it, he should look into the reason for the general's great change in temperament.

Like this, while Gu Fuzhou quite reluctantly engaged in battle, he continued to request the Emperor to let him resign. Half of the Emperor's dragon table was filled with his resignation letters. Finally, the Emperor had reached the end of his forbearance. He summoned all the ministers to the Qinzheng Hall to discuss this matter.

Under the Emperor's fury, everyone was silent. No one dared to touch this meitou.

The emperor raised his eyebrows and said coldly, "I have already refuted Gu Fuzhou's case, and yet he still brings up the same thing again and again. Such arrogance, he must really think himself untouchable even by Zhen!"

Grievances poured out in a torrent from the ministers' hearts. The war in the northwest was raging. During this critical moment, Gu Fuzhou truly was nearly untouchable. However, who would dare to tell the truth to the Emperor?

In the end, it was the crown prince who stood up. Xiao Cheng picked up the scattered reports, sorted them out and put them back on the table. He said, "Father, please calm down. I think that since Gu Fuzhou is still capable of bringing victory, it would be better for him to stay in Yongliang. This is the

time one must make use of their people. One who can be used must naturally be used to his fullest ability."

The Emperor hit the table hard. "With him distracted with thoughts of hurrying home, how is he to protect the northwest for me!"

"Then wait until he really loses. It won't be too late by then to have him replaced."

The ministers exchanged inscrutable glances. The Minister of War said, "If General Gu really is barred from returning, might he deliberately lose to the enemy?"

Xiao Cheng smiled, "If he deliberately loses the battle, abandons the city and causes casualties among his soldiers, how could he still maintain any standing within the army? When that time come, His Majesty will take back military

power from his hands. Who among the generals then would speak up for him?"

The Emperor slowly sat down on the dragon chair. "This is certainly one way."

"Furthermore, with how eager Gu Fuzhou is to return to the capital, his reason must not be as simple as just wanting to retire." Xiao Cheng said, "I beg my father, Your Majesty, to send the Tianji Camp to investigate the reason."

The Emperor felt quite gratified. He rubbed his forehead and said, "Then I shall entrust this matter to the crown prince."

Seeing this, Xiao Cheng asked with concern, "Is Father feeling unwell?"

The Emperor closed his eyes and said, "It is of no problem, simply an old illness."

Everyone said in unison, "Wishing for His Majesty to look after his health."

The Emperor waved his hand and motioned for them to withdraw. Xiao Cheng walked out of Qinzheng Palace and summoned Xue Ying. He asked,

“Has father been suffering from headaches recently?”

Xue Ying said, “Quite. His Majesty is worried about the war in the northwest.”

“Then have Chu Zhengde examine the Emperor’s condition.”

Xue Ying said, “This servant shall send someone to summon him immediately.”

Chu Zhengde served as the assistant Yuan Pan of the Imperial Hospital. He was sixty-five years old and was the most qualified in the entire Imperial Hospital. Despite this, he has occupied the post of assistant Yuan Pan for a decade.

Medicine, like poetry and swordsmanship, have different schools of thought. Chu Zhengde and Lin Yuan Pan belonged to different factions, their political views have diverged for a long time and it was unavoidable that he harbored some feelings of disapproval towards the other. Because of this reason, he didn’t have any good feelings towards Lin Yuan Pan’s son.

After Lin Qingyu arrived at the Imperial Hospital, Hu Ji took him to meet his colleagues and seniors one by one. No matter what others thought of him, outwardly, they were polite. Only Chu Zhengde, said as soon as he came up,

“Are you the yellow-mouthed child who came up with the prescription for the epidemic?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Yes.”

Chu Zhengde, stroking his beard, shook his head and sighed, “Others, if they wish to join the Imperial Hospital, must go through decades of strenuous study, pass the highly selective Imperial Medical Office’s exam and then study at the Imperial Medical Office for at least three years. While you, the male wife of a recently deceased husband, relied on a prescription of questionable efficacy to bypass the exam and enter the Imperial Hospital, all before even reaching weak crown… Alas, public morals are degenerating with each passing day.”

Hu Ji said, “These words of Imperial Physician Chu’s are wrong. Since ancient times, our heroes have come from among the youth. When Lin Yuan Pan himself joined the Imperial Hospital, he too was only 20 years old. Moreover, Imperial Physician Lin’s prescription is not of questionable efficacy. It has already proven to have a miraculous effect on the epidemic. ”

Chu Zhengde sneered and said, “Everything has to be progressed step by step. The more miraculous the effect, the more you have to worry about its potential harm. I am simply afraid that even if Imperial Physician Lin’s

prescription does cure the epidemic, it might bring about a lot of causes for trouble to the patient."

Lin Qingyu said, "The premise for any cause of trouble to exist is that the patient be alive."

Chu Zhengde's face darkened. He was about to argue again when he was called by Xiao Songzi from Qinzheng Palace. Hu Ji said, "That's just how Imperial Physician Chu is. Please don't take it to heart."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "After all, he's been consigned to the position of assistant Yuan Pan for ten years. I can understand."

He has heard his father mention Chu Zhengde before. Father Lin recognized Chu Zhengde's medical skills and also believed that in terms of qualifications alone, Chu Zhengde should be Yuan Pan. However, ten years ago, Chu Zhengde was ordered to ensure that a favored concubine would be able to deliver her child safely. The Emperor had but few male heirs and the woman he doted on was pregnant and so, great importance was placed on this unborn child. And yet under Chu Zhengde's painstaking care, the favored concubine suffered an unexplainable miscarriage. Chu Zhengde was accused of breach of duty. No matter how brilliant his medical skills, he would only ever be assistant Yuan Pan.

Chu Zhengde's emotions were written all on his face. There was nothing to be concerned about. On the contrary, it was those colleagues who smiled at him

on the surface but hid their true intentions beneath who were more worthy of Lin Qingyu's attention.

Lin Qingyu was a newcomer and this first day was quite leisurely. After his shift at the Imperial Hospital, he left the palace compound from the north gate and came to the Imperial Medical Office, heading straight to the library.

It was late at night, the library building was empty and there were two guards posted at he door. The Emperor had granted Lin Qingyu the right to enter and leave the Imperial Medical Office freely. Even though it was past curfew, the guards still opened the door for Lin Qingyu and handed over a lantern. "If Imperial Physician Lin has any requests, please let us know."

Lin Qingyu pushed open the door and entered. Rows of two-story bookshelves appeared in front of him, appearing to stretch on endlessly. Rumor had it that it would take decades to read all the medical books in the Imperial Medical Office's library. Lin Qingyu held the lantern up. After walking around twice, he found several long-lost works from the previous dynasties.

There was a locked iron door at the end of the library building, behind which should be the medical records of the royal family since the founding of the

Dayu. Opposite the library was the Thousand Herb Hall, where you could find any kind of exotic ingredients your heart desired.

This was the Imperial Medical Office — the culmination of the world's medical study.

Lin Qingyu stayed in the library for two hours. It was already the fourth watch by the time he came out. He suddenly remembered that there was an ingredient for a prescription that he couldn't find anywhere in the capital so he turned back and headed to the Thousand Herb Hall.

As soon as he entered through the door, he saw a person in the hall walking towards him. This person couldn't be a student of the Imperial Medical Office. But looking at his calm pace, he didn't look like a thief either.

The man also spotted him and said solemnly, "Who's there?"

Lin Qingyu only felt that this person's voice sounded somewhat familiar. He smelled the strong stench of blood and knew that the man was seriously injured. "Imperial Physician Lin of the Imperial Hospital, Lin Qingyu."

The man's footsteps suddenly stopped.

Lin Qingyu raised the lantern and looked at him. The first thing he saw was the blood-stained black clothes and a blood-stained blade.

After seeing the man's face clearly, Lin Qingyu's heart moved. "It's you."

Chapter 45

This blood-stained, seriously injured young man was none other than Xiao Cheng's personal shadow guard, Shen Huaishi.

Taking a closer look, Lin Qingyu found that Shen Huaishi's injury was more serious than he expected: a knife wound on his chest that cut deep enough to see the flesh was the most deadly. The wound was even faintly black. Aside from this, there were various other large and small sword wounds. If an ordinary person were to be injured like this, they would have long passed out from excessive blood loss. That Shen Huaishi could still stand in front of him as if nothing had happened, he had truly proven himself to have come from the Imperial family's secret guards, the Tianyi Camp.

Lin Qingyu and this person have only met once; that was during Lu Wancheng's funeral when Shen Huaishi placed the edge of his sword against his neck. Had anyone else treated him like this, they would have probably made it on top of his grudge list. But Jiang had told him that the plain-looking shadow guard in front of him would be Xiao Cheng's only weakness in the future.

For Shen Huaishi to be injured like this, he must have gone to do work for his master. After getting injured, he must have come to the Imperial Medical Office to get Jinchuang medicine to stop the bleeding. His eyes stayed on Lin Qingyu's face for a long time. Without saying a word, he covered the stab

wound on his chest with his hands. He made to go around Lin Qingyu's side and leave.

Lin Qingyu said, "One or two applications of Jinchuang medicine might not be enough to fix Imperial Bodyguard Shen's injury."

Shen Huaishi pursed his lips and said, "I won't trouble Imperial Physician Lin to trouble himself over this matter."

"To heal to wounded and to rescue the dying is the duty of every doctor. It is best that you get rid of the poison now while it still hasn't penetrated too deep. Otherwise, the poison will enter your heart and won't be able to practice your martial arts. How can you continue to serve the Crown Prince then?"

Hearing his last statement, Shen Huaishi's expression softened. Lin Qingyu added, "You've been poisoned with the Five Evils Powder from the Western Regions. I happen to know how to dispel it. Would you like me to give it a try?"

Shen Huaishi knew that no matter how powerful his martial arts, he was still just a man. Holding on for this long , he was an arrow at the end of its flight. If he were to reject Lin Qingyu's offer, he might not be able to return to the

Eastern Palace with a clear mind. After weighing his options again and again, he finally said, “Thank you, Imperial Physician Lin.”

Lamps lit up a corner of the Thousand Herb Hall. Shen Huaishi took off his shirt, revealing his hole-riddled chest and back. The entire surface was covered in new wounds and old scars. It was a sight too horrible to endure.

During his study travels, Lin Qingyu had also treated injuries for people of the Jianghu. Most martial arts practitioners had a bunch of large and small injuries. But compared to those martial artists, Shen Huaishi’s condition was far worse. It could be assumed that he’d been working himself to the bone for his master.

If Xiao Cheng was going to fall in love with him, how could he be so willing to let him suffer so much? Perhaps it is as Jiang had said, scumbags always disdain

those who go through fire and water for them, but long for those who regard them as beneath their notice.

Lin Qingyu cleaned up Shen Huaishi's wounds and applied the antidote. "It will hurt a little."

Shen Huaishi shook his head; this pain was nothing to him at all. Lin Qingyu's jade-like face was right in front of his eyes. The teardrop mole at the corner of his eye looked particularly moving under the candlelight.

Noticing of his gaze, Lin Qingyu raised his eyes. "What are you looking at me for?"

"Imperial Physician Lin is as graceful as the moon, a person of matchless beauty. No wonder…" Shen Huaizhi's voice was very soft, showing a look of envy and inferiority, "No wonder His Highness keeps thinking of you."

Lin Qingyu stopped the movements of his hands and looked at him. "Then, with you face, why does the Crown Prince favor you?"

That Xiao Cheng was dissolute was quite true but he either liked people who looked like Jingchun or he bestowed favor among those with real beauty. Shen Huaishi's appearance at first glace looked very ordinary. After scrutinizing it

for a long time, it still looked ordinary. The most that could be said was that he looked very heroic.

Shen Huaishi was momentarily stunned. “How did you…”

“How do I know?” Lin Qingyu glanced at the ambiguous marks on Shen Huaishi’s collarbone, “Wounds and scars aren’t the only marks on your body.”

Shen Huaishi suddenly stood up, the look in his eyes turning vigilant. “Imperial Physician Lin and I are not at all acquainted. How was it that Imperial Physician Lin was able to call out my name last time in the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion?”

Lin Qingyu sidestepped the question. “I haven’t finished applying the medicine yet.”

Knowing that Lin Qingyu didn’t want to answer him, Shen Huaishi said indifferently, “I’ll do it myself.”

Lin Qingyu no longer forced himself to do it. He got up and stepped aside. Shen Huaishi had some injuries on his back, and it would be extremely inconvenient for him to apply the medicine himself. Seeing that Shen Huaishi was finding it difficult to move, Lin Qingyu sneered and said, “You have

suffered quite a lot. And the Crown Prince? Maybe he's out there enjoying yourself with someone else in his arms."

When Shen Huaishi heard the words, he froze. After a while, he said quietly, "He is the Crown Prince. He can bestow favor on whom he so ever wishes – including you, Imperial Physician Lin. You can hide for now but not forever. "

Lin Qingyu smiled. "That's true."

Shen Huaishi only felt that Imperial Physician Lin's smile was very confusing. It seemed to bemoan the state of the universe and pity the fate of mankind; it

had an indescribable charm. It is probably this kind of beauty that could make the Crown Prince turn serious.

Shen Huaishi hastily finished applying the medicine. He thanked Lin Qingyu again: “It’s late and the road is dark. Imperial Physician Lin, please take care on your way home. I shall be taking my leave.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Once the medicine loses its effect, come to the Imperial Hospital to find me. I’ll change the medicine for you.”

“No.” Shen Huaishi knew, “The fewer people who know about a shadow guard being injured, the better.”

“Then I’ll go to the Eastern Palace to find you.” After Lin Qingyu finished speaking, he leaned over and blew out the candle. The Thousand Herb Hall fell back into darkness.

For the next succeeding days, Lin Qingyu did not see Chu Zhengde at the Imperial Hospital. The Emperor’s headache had gotten worse and it has reached the point where it wasn’t even possible for him to attend court. Chu Zhengde personally attended to the Emperor and remained on call in Qinzheng Hall.

When Hu Ji was talking about this, Lin Qingyu was pouding medicine in a mortar. He was currently only a seventh-rank medical officer. Rather than

making patient visits, he spent most of his time making medicine in the Imperial Hospital.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Does the Emperor often get headaches?”

Hu Ji said, “When the Emperor is hard at work handling state affairs, it’s not rare for him to get headaches. This time his headache is quite severe. He can’t even look after the government’s affairs. So he can only have the Crown Prince supervise the country.”

The Emperor was getting old and he now suffered from chronic illnesses like headaches. In the days to come, Xiao Cheng will be supervising the country more and more.

Lin Qingyu put the pounded medicine into the medical box. “I’ll be going out.”

Xiao Cheng was suspicious by nature and the Eastern Palace was heavily guarded. Even though Lin Qingyu was wearing an official uniform and carrying a medicine box, showing at a glance that he was an imperial physician, he was still stopped by the guards of the Eastern Palace. “We have

not received any notice from His Highness regarding the arrival of an imperial physician. Imperial Physician Lin, please turn back."

Lin Qingyu said, "I didn't come here to diagnose or treat His Highness."

"No matter who you are here for, you are not allowed to step even half a foot into the Eastern Palace without His Highness' express permission."

Sure enough, Xiao Cheng's defenses couldn't be compared to those idiots in the Nan'an Hou's mansion. Lin Qingyu was thinking about what to do next when he heard someone call him. "Imperial Physician Lin."

With a few days of rest, Shen Huaishi's complexion looked much better than last time. When the two guards saw him, they cupped their hands in salute and said, "Shen Daren."

"Imperial Physician Lin is here for me." Shen Huaishi said, "I will take him to my room."

"With Shen Daren here, we can rest assured." The guard said, making way for Lin Qingyu.

It could be seen that Xiao Cheng did indeed treat Shen Huai differently from others. Maybe he has yet to reach the point of 'like', but at the very least, he was trusted.

Lin Qingyu followed Shen Huaishi to a room in the back hall. Shen Huaishi

pushed open the door and said, “Lin Shaojun, please.”

The interior of the room is simple and clean, with no unnecessary objects, indicating that the owner of the house was of a serene disposition and rarely returns home. Shen Huaishi poured Lin Qingyu cup of crude tea. “I didn’t expect that you would actually come.”

“Why?”

Shen Huaishi hesitated for a moment and said, “No one cares about the injuries of a shadow guard.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t care either. He approached Shen Huaishi simply because he wanted his master’s life. “In that case, you can care about yourself.” Lin Qingyu opened the medicine box, “Don’t always think about the Crown Prince and be kind to yourself as well.”

Shen Huaishi lowered his eyes and said, “But my life was given by the Crown Prince.” His eyes happened to fall on the corner of the back of Lin Qingyu’s

medicine box. His expression suddenly changed and he grabbed Lin Qingyu's wrist in front of him, "Why do you know the secret code of the Shen family?"

Lin Qingyu frowned and said, "Secret code?"

"This." Shen Huaishi pointed to the strange pattern carved in the corner of the medicine box. His voice trembling slightly, "How do you know…"

Lin Qingyu was silent. He didn't know. The one who knew was that person.

So, this ws the reason why that man gave him this medicine box? For Shen Huaishi to recognize it?

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Let go first."

The two of them were immersed in their own thoughts and they didn't notice the sound of footsteps outside the door getting closer and closer. They only heard the "bang" as the door was pushed open from the outside. Seeing their

two hands, the man's eyes narrowed dangerously. "It seems that I have come at an inopportune time."

Shen Huai came back to his senses, knelt down and saluted, "Your Highness."

Xiao Cheng ignored him and let him stay kneeling. "Why is Little Qingyu here? I leave you alone and you send yourself to my door. But, have you perhaps taken a wrong turn? Gu's bedchamber isn't here. ."

Lin Qingyu said, "Since this official is an imperial physician, naturally, I came to Imperial Guard Shen's room to treat his injuries."

"Injuries?" Xiao Cheng finally looked directly at Shen Huaishi, "Are you injured?"

Shen Huaishi lowered his head and said, "It's but some minor injuries…it is dur to the incompetence of this subordinate."

"You really are incompetent." Xiao Cheng turned the jade thumb ring on his hand, "Such a little thing can actually injure you. What use does Gu have of you — and you still haven't withdrawn."

Shen Huaishi glanced at Lin Qingyu. Lips trembling, he said, "Your Highness, this is my room…"

Xiao Cheng stared at Lin Qingyu's eyes and said with a smile, "And Gu wishes

to use your room to have Little Qingyu help me… diagnose my pulse."

Lin Qingyu's hands hidden in the sleeves of his official uniform clenched into fists. He said lightly, "Seeing Your Highness so leisurely, I presume there has been another great victory in the Northwest?"

Mentioning the Northwest, Xiao Cheng naturally thought of Gu Fuzhou. He also remembered that the beauty in front of him was Gu Fuzhou's adopted brother. A trace of unwillingness appeared in his eyes. Just as he was about to speak, a eunuch hurriedly came to report: "Your Highness, an urgent report

has arrived from Yongliang. All the ministers are waiting for you in Qinzheng Palace."

State affairs were important and Xiao Cheng could tell which was more important. He finally glanced at Shen Huaishi and said, "You're on duty today. Come." After that, he walked away with a flick of his sleeve.

Shen Huaishi staggered to a stand. He gave Lin Qingyu a complicated look and followed. The eunuch said, "Imperial Physician Lin, please go back, as well."

Shen Huaishi was right. He could escape for now but not forever. Only once Xiao Cheng disappears forever could he feel completely relieved.

Xiao Cheng walked into Qinzheng Palace and waved his hand to do away with the ministers' courtesies. "What? Did Gu Fuzhou send another resignation letter?"

"To answer His Highness, since His Majesty told him he can came back once he is 'defeated', General Gu has not sent a resignation letter." The Minister of War said, "This time, he said in his report that he has intercepted a secret letter sent by the army to the Xixia capital. Inside is a coded message. He suspects that it conceals Xixia military secrets. But no one in the Zhengxi Army can understand it. General Gu wishes for His Majesty to publicize the message, to

look for people of skill and ability within the capital to decipher this coded message for him."

"Now, there's this thing." Xiao Cheng was suspicious, "What is this coded message? Let's hear it."

The Minister of War cleared his throat and said solemnly, "If odd, change; if even, remain the same."

47

Chapter 46

"If odd, change; if even, remain the same…If odd, change; if even, remain the same…" Xiao Chen silently repeated the so-called Xixia secret code. For a while, he absolutely didn't know what to make of it. "It's been a while since you saw the report." Xiao Teng said, "Let's hear your ideas."

The Prime Minister thought deeply. "'Odd' and 'even' are opposites. If 'Odd' change, but if 'Even' do not change…I think this may be alluding to the time

when the Xixia army marches. On odd-numbered days, they go; on even-numbered days, they stop ."

The Minister of War carefully thought about it. "The word 'change' is particularly debatable. I thing this may pertain to a change in the formation. The Xixia might use a changeable formation to attack our army."

The crown prince's herald muttered to himself, "The theory of odd and even is often used in mathematics. Perhaps this sentence is alluding to a certain mathematical law."

The Assistant Minister of Revenue couldn't agree. He said doubtfully, "What does mathematical laws have to do with marching and fighting?"

…

They discussed for a long time. Every theory they came up with had some aspect of it that was a little far-fetched and in the end, no one could fully

convince the others. Xiao Cheng calmly watched the ministers arguing, and when they grew were quiet, he said unhurriedly, “Have you finished?”

The Prime Minister respectfully asked, “May I ask the Crown Prince for his opinion.”

Xiao Cheng slowly blew the steam from his tea cup and said, “Do you actually believe Gu Fuzhou’s claim that this is a coded message from the Xixia?”

Everyone looked at each other in dismay. Lying about the military situation was tantamount to deceiving the emperor, which was a serious crime. Given General Gu’s personal conduct, how could he do such a thing?

The Ministry of War asked, sounding him out, “What does Your Highness mean?”

Xiao Cheng put down the tea cup. “In the past three months, Gu Fuzhou’s temperament has changed greatly. His behavior and character has become questionable. A while ago, he was clamoring to return to the capital and today, he came up with an inexplicable Xixia coded message.” Xiao Cheng His eyes narrowed slightly, “I wonder if this coded message has something to do with his reason for returning to the capital.”

The crown prince’s herald said, “Now that His Highness mentioned it, this official also feels that there is something inappropriate with General Gu’s request. If this message, ‘If odd, change; if even, remain the same’ really does conceal the Xixia’s secret military plans, how could we possibly “publicize” it?

Even in the capital, the very stronghold of the Emperor, there will inevitably be spies from hostile countries. General Gu requesting us to do this, is he not afraid of beating the grass and startling the snake.?"

"General Gu is a warrior, after all. He is eager for victory. It is not surprising for him to commit some oversight." The Prime Minister said, "His Highness, the battle in the northwest is at a stalemate. I would rather believe in the validity of the coded message than not. This secret message still needs to be solved."

Xiao Cheng's lips hooked up in a sneer. "Naturally, it shall be decoded. After all, Gu also really wants to know just what medicine Gu Fuzhou is selling in his gourd. But, we won't be going about it in the way that he wishes." Xiao Cheng thought for a while and said, "'Publicizing' it is out of the question. Go and find the scholars of the Imperial Academy and have them solve it in the side hall of Qinzheng Palace. They shall remain there until they crack it. No one unrelated to this matter should know of this coded message, do you all understand?"

The scholars of the Imperial Academy were all exceptionally rare talents. If they couldn't figure it out, how could ordinary people possibly do it? The Minister of War praised his decision, "His Highness is wise."

The next day, the Imperial Academy, located by the west gate of the palace compound, was deserted. Not a single scholar was to be seen. And except for

they themselves, no one knew what they were up to. In the Imperial Hospital, standing opposite the Imperial Academy, it was business as usual.

Most of the people who came to the Imperial Hospital to request for the services of an imperial physician were the maids and eunuchs of the various palaces. Just by looking at their clothes and bearing, you could already tell the status of their master in the palace. For example, a palace maid who came today, her clothes were not particularly resplendent but she had a naturally poised bearing and a classy temperament. The eunuchs of the Imperial Hospital were also particularly friendly to her. It turned out that this person was Lu Yao, a maid from Fengyi Palace.

As soon as Lu Yao crossed the doorway of the Imperial Hospital, Chu Zhengde stood up. “For Lu Yao nuniang to come here, is Her Majesty feeling ill? Let me clear these away and I’ll head to Fengyi Palace immediately.”

“There is no need to trouble yourself, Imperial Physician Chu.” Among the many imperial physicians on duty, Lu Yao instantly caught sight of the most eye-catching one, “The Empress specially requested for Imperial Physician Lin to check her pulse for her.”

Chu Zhengde’s head whipped around to look at Lin Qingyu. His beard shaking with anger, he said, “Him? A seventh-grade medical officer who has just joined

the Imperial Hospital? How could he possibly be qualified to look after the Empress' health?!"

Lin Qingyu cast a glance at Chu Zhengde and hoisted his medicine box on his back.

Mindless idiot. The Empress definitely wasn't looking for him to examine her pulse. If he guessed correctly, it should be for Lu Wancheng.

Lu Yao said indifferently: "I do not know. Imperial Physician Lin, please follow me to Fengyi Palace."

Chu Zhengde stared at Lin Qingyu's retreating back, his beard almost smoking from anger. "Impudent junior!"

Lin Qingyu arrived at Fengyi Palace and paid his respects to the Empress. He knelt on the ground and was about to open the medicine box when he heard

the Empress say, “There is no need to bother. I wasn’t looking for you today for that — You may rise.”

Lin Qingyu stood up and the Empress looked him up and down. She said, gratified, “You look good in this official uniform.”

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and said, “The Empress bestows undue praise.”

“How are you doing in the Imperial Hospital?”

“Everything is satisfactory. Thank you for your concern.”

“I have seen Wancheng’s will and testament.” The Empress looked upset. “Everything he wrote was about you. He earnestly begged me to return your freedom. How could I, as his aunt, refuse? Of course, you have proven yourself quite capable as well. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have been able to join the Imperial Hospital.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t have much interest in talking with the Empress. So, he merely stood and said nothing. The Empress sighed and said, “Wancheng,

looking down in Heaven, must feel very gratified to see how you are now. Forget it, it's been more than three months since Wancheng has left."

Lin Qingyu's eyelashes trembled slightly. "Yes. In three more days, it will be a hundred days."

"Life flies so fast." The Empress said sadly, "I have ordered someone to light an Ever-burning candle for Wancheng in Changsheng Temple. If you have time, go to the temple and light some incense for him."

Lin Qingyu saluted and said, "This official shall do as Her Majesty suggests."

Two days later, Lin Qingyu took Huan Tong to Changsheng Temple, taking advantage of his day off.

It was April and the world was full of fragrance. The peach blossoms of the mountain temple were beginning to bloom. With the passing of March, the long winter was finally over. This time last year was also the time when that person was most alive.

Wancheng's memorial tablet was enshrined in Changsheng Temple's side hall. Lin Qingyu lit three sticks of incense, borrowing fire from the ever-burning

candle. He bowed three times, offering his prayers and placed the incense sticks in front of the tablet.

“Imperial Physician Lin.”

Lin Qingyu turned around and wasn’t at all surprised to see a visitor. “Imperial Guard Shen.”

Shen Huaishi was still wearing that black outfit, a sword at his waist. When he wasn’t beside Xiao Cheng or in the palace, he could certainly be regarded as having an imposing and impressive appearance. “Imperial Physician Lin seems to have expected my arrival.”

“I only guessed that you would come to me. However, I didn’t know that you would come to Changsheng Temple to find me today.” Lin Qingyu said calmly, “It seems that Imperial Guard Shen has been shadowing me.”

“It…it isn’t my wish.” Shen Huaishi whispered, “But it’s inconvenient to talk in the palace. I can only look for opportunities outside—I’m sorry.” He walked to

the ever-burning candle and looked at Lu Wancheng's tablet. He said, "Imperial Physician Lin, was it difficult to overcome the pain of bereavement?"

"It's alright. You just need to find something for yourself."

Shen Huaishi gave a distressed and said, "If everyone were as open-minded as Imperial Physician Lin, there wouldn't be so many pining lovers in the world."

Lin Qingyu didn't have the patience to 'lament over the passing of spring and coming of autumn' with Shen Huaishi. "You came to me because of the mark on my medicine box?"

Shen Huaishi nodded. "That is the secret code that only the people in the Shen Family's Heavenly Prison Sect know of. But now, I am the only one left of the Heavenly Prison Sect…" Shen Huaishi's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "How does Imperial Physician Lin know about it? "

Since this was all planned by Jiang, there was no need for him to hide it. "I don't know. This medicine box was given to me by my deceased husband."

"Young Master Hou? How did he…" Shen Huaishi frowned and pondered for a moment, "Imperial Physician Lin, where is that medicine box now?"

"I pretty much carry it with me everywhere. It's in the carriage right now."

Lin Qingyu asked Huan Tong to fetch the medicine box. Shen Huaishi stroked that peculiar mark with his fingers and asked, "Imperial Physician Lin, can I

take it apart and have a look?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment, and said, "Do as you please."

Shen Huaishi carefully took out everything from the medicine box. After a few flashes from his sword, countless cracks appeared on the surface of the mahogany medicine box and it burst open with a "bang".

Among the countless wooden chips, something emerald green was revealed. Shen Huaishi's breathing turned shaky and he picked up the emerald green

object – it was a jade plaque with the words “Heavenly Prison” engraved on one side.

“How could this be…” Shen Huaishi murmured in a low voice, “When someone from the Heavenly Prison Sect dies, their jade plaques are destroyed as well… Is there someone still alive?”

Lin Qingyu said, “There is a line of small characters on the back of the jade plaque.” Looking at the nicks of the small characters, it must have been engraved recently.

Shen Huaishi turned it over and read it aloud, “Xuzhou, Suicheng…”

Lin Qingyu seemed lost in thought. “Xuzhou?”

Jiang wanted to lead Shen Huaishi to Xuzhou to find the owner of this jade plaque?

Lin Qingyu asked, “Are you going?”

Shen Huaishi didn’t hesitate. “Of course!”

Lin Qingyu whispered, “You are a shadow guard with impressive martial arts abilities. But your mind is as innocent as a child’s. You trust my deceased husband so much?” He was the type to be led by nose by others. It was

understandable how he can be so smitten and dead set on Xiao Cheng. Jiang probably knew this and that was why he could do something like this.

Shen Huaishi's chest rose and fell violently. His eyes were slightly red. "As long as there is a glimmer of hope, I will, definitely…"

"When are you going to go?" Lin Qingyu said, "Will the Crown Prince let you go?"

Shen Huaishi's eyes revealed a sense of loss but it was quickly replaced by determination. "I will find a way."

Heavenly Prison Sect… He had never heard of it before. Seeing the Shen Huaishi's preoccupied appearance, now was not a good time to get to the bottom of the matter.

"If you think of a way, let me know." Lin Qingyu said, "I also wish to go to Xuzhou to see what my deceased husband was thinking."

Shen Huaishi held the jade plaque tightly and said a hoarse, "Alright."

By the time Lin Qingyu walked out of Changsheng Temple, it was almost dusk. The setting sun colored the sky in tongues of flame. Soon, once it burns out,

this day will be over. He was about to get into the carriage when a little monk stopped him. “Patron Lin.”

Lin Qingyu remembered this little monk. The last time he came to Changsheng Temple with Jiang, it was this monk who invited the Jiang to see Xu Junyuan.

Xu Junyuan…

Lin Qingyu’s heart moved and he asked, “Is the national teacher looking for me?”

“The national teacher is still in retreat and he can not see anyone.” The little monk said, “But before he entered his retreat, he ordered me to hand

something over to Patron Lin." After saying so, the little monk took out a silk brocade bag from his bosom, "Patron Lin, please. "

Lin Qingyu took the bag and opened it. Inside was a note with ten characters written on it – the Eight Characters of one's birth and a name.

"This is……"

Looking at the familiar handwriting, Lin Qingyu's eyes were a little dry from the wind. He had even just been laughing at Shen Huaishi's loss of control over his emotions just now. Now, it was his hands that were shaking.

On the ninety-ninth day after that person left, he finally knew his name.

He didn't expect that constantly sleep deprived salted fish to be named like this.

48

Chapter 47

Back home, Lin Qingyu went to the mourning hall alone. There was only one person's tablet enshrined in the hall. He looked at the roughly carved characters "Jiang Dazhuang" and stood there for a long time in a trance.

"You told Xu Junyuan, but you didn't tell me." Lin Qingyu said softly, "And you said you weren't a bastard."

The warm wind blew. No one answered him.

There was a knock on the door, and Huan Tong said from outside, "Young Master, Manager Zhang is here."

Before Lin Qingyu headed out, he said to the tablet, "But as long as you can come back on time, I won't scold you anymore."

Zhang Shiquan had been called by Lin Qingyu. He didn't know what Lin Qingyu wanted him for, calling him out this night. So he first truthfully reported the situation to Nan'an Hou. In just one short month, the Hou Mansion had undergone earth-shaking changes. It was no longer dull and lifeless and the reason for that — Pan Shi was expecting.

This was something Lin Qingyu never thought possible. He had underestimated Nan'an Hou; despite being so devastated, he struggled to get

up and find a way out for himself.

“After the doctor diagnosed Pan Shi as being with child, it could be said that Master Hou’s was illness was cured without any need for medicine. Now, there is no longer any need for him to be confined in bed. Soon, he may be able to return to court.”

“He may be of a mind to return to court, but there may no longer be a place for him there.” After saying this, Lin Qingyu returned to the original matter. “During the few months you were in Xuzhou, aside from investigating the

matter of the private salt business, you also handled quite a few matters for the Young Master Hou, isn't that right?"

Zhang Shiquan was momentarily stunned and then, he smiled bitterly, "It seems there is nothing that can be hidden from the young master."

"Tell me."

Zhang Shiquan said, "Young Master Hou asked me to find someone in Suicheng in Xuzhou. He instructed me to find a way to obtain a certain token from him."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Who is this person?"

"I only know that he is a butcher under the pseudonym Zhu Yongxin. As for this person's real identity and real name, I am afraid only Young Master Hou knew."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "You've worked hard. Later, go to the warehouse and get some tonic and give to Pan Yiniang."

Zhang Shiquan said, "Yes, Young Master."

The next day, when Lin Qingyu woke up early in the morning, he felt as though his chest were empty, his heart missing. Hua Lu entered the room and

saw Lin Qingyu sitting by the bed in a daze. She called out, “Young Master?”

Lin Qingyu suddenly said, “Today, let’s go back to the Lin Residence.”

It may be that not everyone knew about him moving house.

When they arrived at the Lin Residence, Lin Qingyu accompanied Mother Lin for a meal and then spent the rest of the time in the study. Seeing that he was in a bad mood, Mother Lin stopped Lin Qinghe, who wanted to stick to his brother. “Your brother wants to be by himself.”

Lin Qingyu sat alone, from day til night, until they began to light the lanterns. Huan Tong came in and reminded him, “Young Master, it’s time for you to enter the palace.”

Tonight, Lin Qingyu had to be on duty at the Imperial Hospital for six hours.

Lin Qingyu asked him, “What time is it?”

Huan Tong replied: “It’s already Xushi.”

“Then until Zishi, there’s still…” Lin Qingyu stopped speaking. He calmed down, and said, “Help me change clothes.”

The curtain of the night shrouded everything and the palace gate was locked. Most of the imperial physicians on duty at the Imperial Hospital were the

young ones with less seniority, with only one or two of the older physicians in charge.

Hu Ji was preparing medicine according to a prescription. He was unsure of the dosage for one of the medicines, so he raised his head and asked Lin Qingyu beside him, “Imperial Physician Lin, would it be better if this Snowdrop bush was a little less–Imperial Physician Lin?”

Lin Qingyu came back to his senses and said, “What?”

Hu Ji put down the medicine and asked, “What has been on your mind these days? It feels like you’ve been absent-minded.”

Lin Qingyu rubbed the space between his brows. “It’s nothing.”

“If something has happened, you must tell me.” Hu Ji said sincerely, “I can…”

Before Hu Ji could finish speaking, a panicked voice came from outside the hospital. “Imperial Physician Hu! Is Imperial Physician Hu here?!”

The person who came was the little eunuch in charge of sweeping Qinzheng Hall, Little Fu Zi. He came to the imperial hospital in the middle of the night because a eunuch who stayed in the same room with him suddenly fell ill, suffering from unbearable abdominal pain. They were eunuchs and no one

really cared when they got sick. Only Imperial Physician Hu would diagnose and treat them wholeheartedly.

Imperial Physician Hu packed his things without another word. “I’ll go right away.”

Lin Qingyu said, “You still have to make those beauty pills for Concubine Chen. I’ll go.”

Imperial Physician Hu said in surprise, “You’re willing to go?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. He wanted something to do and only when he was facing a patient could he find a moment of peace.

Hu Ji was the only one Little Fu Zi trusted. He was a little uneasy when he heard this. “Imperial Physician Hu isn’t coming?”

Hu Ji smiled and said, “Don’t worry, Imperial Physician Lin’s medical skills are better than mine. With him there, there absolutely won’t be any problem.

Don't you know that Imperial Physician Lin was the one who came up with the cure for the epidemic?"

Little Fu Zi's eyes lit up. "Really? Thank you, Imperial Physician Lin!"

Lin Qingyu said, "Lead the way."

Lin Qingyu followed Xiao Fu Zi to Sili Jian where the eunuchs lived. The imperial palace was grand and magnificent but the other side of this stately-ness and solemnity were these cramped rooms where seven to eight eunuchs were squeezed it. The room he arrived at could still be considered quite good. The eunuchs who stayed here were those who served in Qinzheng Hall. The people serving around the Emperor had to at least be clean and odorless. Eunuchs assigned to do the most strenuous labor usually had a sour odor on their bodies.

Lin Qingyu diagnosed the sick eunuch as suffering from a stomachache from having eaten something bad. Lin Qingyu gave him something to induce vomiting, making him empty out the contents of his stomach. The patient

should make a full recovery after drinking stomach-nourishing medicine for a few days.

Little Fu Zi thanked him repeatedly, “I’ll send Imperial Doctor Lin back to the Imperial Hospital.”

Lin Qingyu said, “No need.”

“But it’s already Zishi and it would be hard to make your way back in the dark.”

Lin Qingyu was stunned. “It’s already Zishi?”

Xiao Fuzi said, “Yes.”

The last piece in Lin Qingyu’s heart emptied. This day has finally passed.

He still hadn’t shown up.

Rebirth from death. Just how rare was a soul transfer? Before that person, he had never even heard of such a thing. Experiencing it once was already unbelievable. How could he possibly be given it a second time?

To die is to die. After death, there is nothing left.

He actually believed that person’s nonsense. So stupid.

Lin Qingyu stared fixedly at one spot for a long time. He suddenly closed his

eyes, as though he could escape something by doing so. After that, he carried his brand new medicine box and said, "I… I can make it back on my own."

When he got to the door of the room, the eunuch who was sleeping on one side turned over in his sleep and muttered indistinctly, "If Odd change, if even remain the same…if odd change, if even…"

Lin Qingyu stopped abruptly. He looked down in disbelief, staring at the handsome little eunuch.

The little eunuch, completely unaware in his deep sleep, still kept muttering that sentence: "If add change, if even remain the same…"

Lin Qingyu's pupils instantly shrank. His body grew numb from head to toe. Without a care for anything else, he grabbed the eunuch by the collar, pulling him up.

The eunuch opened his eyes drowsily and looked at Lin Qingyu blankly, "Am I dreaming of immortals…?"

Lin Qingyu's mind went blank for a while. He instinctively uttered the words he'd been reciting countless times in his heart, "For the symbol look to the quadrant?"

The eunuch was even more at a loss: "…what?"

Lin Qingyu had mixed feelings. For a while, he didn't know what to say. He

looked down at the eunuch and said, voice trembling, “You…you’ve realized your lifelong dream…”

He’d transmigrated to a eunuch? Becoming an actual Lao Gong?

“Imperial Physician Lin?” Little Fu Zi wanted to hold him back but felt that his hands were not worthy of touching such a beautiful imperial doctor. “Imperial Physician Lin, this is Xiao Songzi from Qinzheng Hall. Is there something you need from him?”

Lin Qingyu was momentarily dazed but his reason gradually returned. If that person was in the palace, he would have come to him long ago. It was more likely that Xiao Songzi knew this sentence because someone else had told him.

Lin Qingyu’s hand suddenly became ruthless, his expression, cold. He said sharply, “Where did you hear this sentence?”

Xiao Songzi was grabbed by the collar. He was almost out of breath, “What, what sentence…?”

“If odd, change; if even, remain the same!”

“I don’t know, I don’t know anything.” Xiao Songzi’s face flushed. “I just keep hearing it from the scholars in Qinzheng Hall. They keep repeating this

sentence, from morning to night, like chanting scripture. Before I knew it, I'd memorized it too…"

Lin Qingyu slowly let go, his mind in a whirl. The surprise at having lost and then suddenly finding and the perturbed feeling of not knowing the truth, mingled in his mind.

But now was not a time for surprise or apprehension. He needed to calm down and find out more information.

Hu Ji has mentioned Xiao Songzi to him many times and they've gotten a lot of information from him. According to Hu Ji, Xiao Songzi was simple-minded and knew how to repay gratitude. He was a very trust-worthy person. If what Xiao Songzi said was true, how did the scholars of the Imperial Academy know this?

Lin Qingyu's expression cleared up slightly. He asked, "What else did you hear in Qinzheng Hall?"

Xiao Songzi said slowly, "That's all. The door to the side hall of Qinzheng Hall is always kept closed and no one can come out. I can go in because I have to

deliver meals to them three times a day… Oh, yes, I also heard them mention Xixia a few times."

Lin Qingyu asked again, "When did the scholars of the Imperial Academy get locked up in the Qinzheng Hall?"

"About three or five days ago. I don't even know what they're doing."

Now that the Emperor was seriously ill, the Crown Prince was in charge of the country. Xiao Cheng must have been the one who ordered all the scholars secluded in Qinzheng Hall. So, the source of the message was Xiao Cheng? Did Xiao Cheng also learn it from Xixia?

In any case, that person was still alive, and it was possible that he is in Xixia or at the Dayu's border. The border between Xixia and the Dayu was in constant turmoil. Perhaps that person knew that he wouldn't be able to come back on time, so he made this unwise decision.

He was still alive, but he couldn't come to him for a long time. Instead, he used God knows what method to pass on the code to the Dayu's court. This clearly meant that he either could not get away or that he needed to conceal his

identity. He let Xiao Cheng know this code, not for Qi Yu to respond but simply to convey the fact that he was still alive through Xiao Cheng's mouth.

That being the case, he mustn't expose it either. At least, he couldn't respond to this secret message in front of Xiao Cheng.

Lin Qingyu pondered for a long time. His rapidly beating heart finally calmed down. He said to Xiao Songzi, "I owe you a favor for this matter."

Xiao Songzi gave an embarrassed smile, "Imperial Physician Lin is a friend of Imperial Physician Hu. And you were willing to come to where the eunuchs live to treat us. We don't know how to repay you except to reveal some irrelevant gossip."

Lin Qingyu suddenly felt it was good to be a good person occasionally.

Chapter 48

Lin Qingyu asked Xiao Songzi to help him keep an eye on the situation in Qinzheng Hall. But Xiao Songzi was only a eunuch charged with delivering meals. He was only ever in Qinzheng Hall for a short time every day and the information he could get was limited.

Lin Qingyu pieced together these scattered clues. The only thing that was certain was that the message “If Odd, change; if even, remain the same” came from either Xixia or Yongliang and that Xiao Cheng summoned the Imperial Academy scholars to Qinzheng Hall to decipher this code.

The thought of going to Yong Liang to find that person did cross his mind. But when he thought about it calmly, it was obviously not a wise move; not to mention that Yong Liang was a long way from the capital, taking at least a month to go there and back. Even if he did go, it would be like looking for a needle in a haystack without any clues to go by. It would be better to stay in the palace and find some clues.

At this time, Lin Qingyu was in no hurry. It was good that that person was alive. No matter how difficult the situation was, but as long as they were live, they would meet again. What’s more, he has long understood that person’s

temperament. He may be lazy, but when it came conspiracies and tricks, he was no match for him.

He believed that that person would do everything possible to get back to him. He didn't have to go anywhere. He'll just wait for him where he was.

He also didn't know… how that person looked like now. Old or young, male or female, beautiful or ugly. Jiang liked looking at beauties, he once ranked the most handsome men in the capital. Lu Wancheng was already considered a rare handsome son of nobility but it still wasn't as good as his original appearance. When Jiang had reappeared in front of him on the seventh night after his death, he made it a point to emphasize this fact. It showed that he was very satisfied with his appearance. If he had transmigrated to have an ugly appearance this time, Jiang had probably gotten so angry that he vomited blood. He might not even have the face to appear in front of him.

If he had become a woman, given his character, after a period of inner struggle and pain, he had probably calmly accepted it. Maybe he could even find a man

to marry him who would let him just lie down, eat and drink. Then, if that were the case… better to just marry him.

Thinking of this, a long-absent smile reappeared on Lin Qingyu's face. His eyes were clear like water and his cheeks were brighter than the blooming peonies. Hu Ji, who'd been watching him, couldn't help but be entranced.

Hu Ji couldn't help asking: "Imperial Physician Lin, why are you so happy?"

The corners of Lin Qingyu's lips rose slightly. "It's been a hundred days since my husband's passing. Is this not worth being happy about?"

"This…" Hu Ji quickly retracted his gaze, not daring to look at him again. Although beautiful people were beautiful; ordinary people would never have the fortune to have them. He himself was certain he never would have this blessing and so he didn't even dare to entertain any delusions.

As the two were talking, an eccentric sounding voice came from behind them, "Is engaging in idle chatter part of your duties?!"

The speaker was naturally none other than Chu Zhengde. Since last time when Lin Qingyu was called to Fengyi Palace, Chu Zhengde found him more and more offensive to look at. This treatment extended even to Hu Ji, who was close to him.

The Imperial Hospital was a place where they placed great importance on seniority. They were subordinate officials and naturally they couldn't blatantly

disobey Chu Zhengde. Hu Ji closed his mouth, feeling embarrassed. Lin Qingyu was in a good mood and didn't feel like bothering to argue with the old fool.

Not long after, a eunuch from the Eastern Palace came to the Imperial Hospital, saying that His Royal Highness the Crown Prince was feeling unwell. Lin Qingyu was being summoned to the Eastern Palace to provide diagnosis and treatment.

The first time, he could bear with it; the second time, he was driven to the edge of his forbearance. Chu Zhengde said angrily, "It has always been I who looked after the health of the master of the Eastern Palace. If not I, then Hu Ji. Lin Qingyu is of little talent and shallow learning, how could His Highness request him for diagnosis and treatment?" Both the Empress and the Crown Prince

have bypassed him, looking for Lin Qingyu instead. This was nothing short of a slap to the face!

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “It seems that Imperial Physician Chu wishes to be the one to go and give the diagnosis and treatment to the Crown Prince. If Imperial Physician Chu wants this blessing, then by all means.”

The East Palace’s eunuch said coldly, “Who among us could possibly guess His Highness’s intentions? We simply need to obey his orders. Could it be that you intend to disobey and disrespect His Highness?”

Chu Zhengde stomped his foot. “It just doesn’t make sense!”

Hu Ji knew vaguely what the Crown Prince’s thoughts were of Lin Qingyu. He said worriedly, “Imperial Physician Lin, you must be careful.”

“It’s alright.” Lin Qingyu put a porcelain bottle into his sleeve, “The Crown Prince is wary of General Gu, so he shouldn’t do anything to me.”

He and Gu Fuzhou had never met and Gu Fuzhou recognized his father as his adoptive father only because of his life-saving grace. Gu Fuzhou was far away in Yong Liang but he was able to shelter him under his illustrious military achievements, making it so that Xiao Cheng couldn’t lay his hands on him for

the time being. Even if it was unintentional on Gu Fuzhou's part, he deserved to be thanked in person.

Just in case, Lin Qingyu said again, "Won't you go to Changle Palace to ask Concubine Chen to let you diagnose her pulse?"

Arriving at the Easter Palace, Lin Qingyu followed the eunuch to the side hall where the crown prince was resting. "Imperial Physician Lin, please."

Lin Qingyu walked into the hall. Inside, it was like a fierce gale had passed through. Atop the mess as a wine case filled with empty jugs. Xiao Cheng was laying on his side behind the wine case. he had his neck tilted, pouring wine into his mouth. He looked both greasy and desolate.

Lin Qingyu knelt down and saluted according to customary etiquette. "Your Highness."

Xiao Chen threw away the jug and staggered to his feet. He looked downed at him from above. "You're here, you have the nerve to keep Gu waiting"

"This humble official would not dare."

"What would you not dare? Gu can clearly see that you have a lot of nerve." Xiao Cheng looked at him for a good long while, his eyes gradually becoming

confused. He raised his hand, wanting to touch his face, “Your eyes…you were born with very good eyes.”

Lin Qingyu felt nausea in his stomach. He tilted his head to avoid Xiao Cheng’s hand. It was as though Xiao Cheng had been dealt a heavy blow. It seemed that he could now see clearly that the person in front of him wasn’t the one in his heart. “Jingchun would never look at a Gu with this kind of eyes,” Xiao Cheng’s mouth curved into a cruel arc, “If you were blind, I wonder if you would be more like Jingchun, eyes filled only with innocence.”

Lin Qingyu looked at him quietly, but in his heart, he was thinking up of countless ways to humiliate the other. Xiao Cheng gave him inspiration — blinding him was one way; or he could simply take out his eyeballs, that seemed quite interesting as well.

“Your Highness has drunk too much.” Lin Qingyu said, “This humble official will give you a prescription for sobering up.”

Xiao Chen roared, “Look at Gu!”

“If there is nothing else, this humble official will be taking his leave.”

Xiao Cheng suddenly grabbed his arm, his eyes widenening in anger. He said fiercely, “I am the Crown Prince. If Gu wants you, what can you do! Yes, you

are the Gu Fuzhou's adoptive brother. But would Gu Fuzhou dare embarrass me over an adoptive brother he barely recognizes?!"

Lin Qingyu's eyes darkened and he unpextedly laughed out loud. "Then try it."

He might not be able to escape this disaster but Xiao Cheng won't be leaving the Eastern Palace alive either. It was a pity that he was going to die with this dog thing.

He suddenly remembered what Jiang had said on their wedding night: "Lin Qingyu…the beautiful imperial doctor who died in the Eastern Palace?"

I see.

So this was to be his end.

Xiao Cheng's eyes were locked on his face, he still hadn't let go but made no further moves. Just then, a figure walked in.

It was Shen Huaishi.

Unless their master was in trouble, a shadow guard wouldn't just show up. Xiao Cheng narrowed his eyes and said coldly, "What are you doing here?"

Shen Huaishi knelt on the ground with a thud and slammed his head down. "I

beg Your Highness… Please let Imperial Physician Lin go."

Xiao Cheng observed the expressions of the two of them. He suddenly let out a strange laugh. "Say that again."

Shen Huaishi said, "Your Highness has simply lost control from drinking. If he were sober, he would definitely not be like this."

"You're begging for him? You're actually begging for him!" Xiao Cheng's laughter grew louder and louder, not knowing which of them he was jealous

of, “I finally understand why Little Qingyu was so kind enough to apply medicine for you, hahaha—”

Shen Huaishi’s voice trembled, “This subordinate knows that today is the Princess Jingchun’s birthday and His Highness becomes like this every year at this time…”

“Shut up.” Xiao Cheng looked grim, “Since you’re protecting him like this, why don’t you take his place instead!” After saying so, he pulled Shen Huaishi up and stretched his hand from Shen Huaishi’s chest.

Shen Huaishi’s eyes widened: “Your Highness?!”

“Why, you’re shy? And here I thought I wasn’t feeding you enough, so you go and fool around with other men under my nose!”

Shen Huaishi shook his head helplessly, “This subordinate has not…”

Lin Qingyu tightly clutched the medicine bottle in his sleeve, forcing himself to calmly think about countermeasures in this situation. Shen Huaishi was

skilled in martial arts and he had the medicine in his hand. If Shen Huaishi was willing to cooperate, they might be able to…

At this time, a voice came from outside: "The imperial concubine is coming—"

Xiao Cheng paused and asked sharply, "Why has my concubine mother suddenly come?"

"The imperial concubine heard that His Highness was ill and she went to the Imperial Hospital to ask for an imperial doctor. She came specially to visit His Highness."

"Why would my concubine mother make such a big fuss over nothing." Xiao Cheng looked at Lin Qingyu, an ominous glint concealed in his eyes, "Unless someone had been adding oil and vinegar in front of her?"

Lin Qingyu stuffed the medicine bottle back into his sleeve and said calmly, "This humble official does not know."

His drunkeness had subsided and Xiao Cheng regained some clear-headedness. He looked at Shen Huaishi, who was lying on the ground, a

strange look flashed in his eyes. “Put your clothes on and order someone to make a cup of sobering soup.”

Shen Huaishi crawled up from the ground, holding together the lapels of his robes. Head lowered, he said, “…Yes.”

Lin Qingyu walked out of the Eastern Palace unscathed. In a deserted corner, he took a deep breath.

He couldn’t help thinking, if Gu Fuzhou hadn’t recognized his father as his adoptive father and he hadn’t gotten to know Shen Huaishi, would he have been so lucky today?

Without Gu Fuzhou, Xiao Cheng wouldn’t have had that moment of hesitation; had he not deliberately approached Shen Huaishi, not only would

he have not intercede for him but he would have shown up when he attacked Xiao Cheng and plunged that blade into his neck.

He might have died in the Eastern Palace, under the Shen Huaishi's sword.

In the dark, it was as if… as if there were these pair of hands pulling him from destiny's outcome.

Lin Qingyu looked up at the sky towards the northwest. He said softly, "Is it you?"

Even if they were separated from each other, unable to see one another, that person was still protecting him in his own way.

For the first time in his new lease on life, Lin Qingyu suddenly lost strength and with the palace wall against his back, slowly crouched to the ground. "When are you coming back…"

It was night, Qinzheng Hall was brightly lit. The cabinet ministers were all gathered around a newly-arrived urgent missive from the northwest. All of them had solemn expressions on their faces.

Xiao Cheng tapped the table with his fingertips. He felt restless and the front of his head was aching from too much drink.

Not long after, Chu Zhengde walked in with Xiao Songzi leading the way.

“Your Highness.”

Xiao Cheng wasted no time on nonsense. “Let me ask you, do you know of a poison called ‘Sky Spider’?”

“Your Highness, this is a strange poison from the North. If the poisoned person does not receive an antidote, his internal organs will be attacked by the poison, slowly causing organ failure until death.”

“Then is there an antidote for the Sky Spider?”

“Yes, but the antidote is extremely complicated.” Chu Zhengde told everything he knew. “We would need to use the thousand-year-old snow lotus from the north as a supplement. It should be ground into powder using warm jade mortar exclusively found in the Imperial Medical Office’s Thousand Herb Hall.

The medicine should be given immediately after it is prepared. Only by taking this medicine can the poisoned person be detoxified."

Xiao Cheng said, "You mean to say, this poison can only be detoxified in the Imperial Medical Office?"

"Exactly."

"Alright, you may withdraw."

After Chu Zhengde withdrew, Xiao Cheng said solemnly, "Don't you think it's strange that someone in Yong Liang would be poisoned by the Central North?"

The Prime Minister said, "Your Highness, the Tianji Camp has already confirmed the poisoning to be true. No matter how he was poisoned, our top priority should be to get rid of the poison first."

Xiao Cheng's face was ugly. He was completely unwilling but he had no choice but to compromise. Gritting his teeth, he said, "Deliver Gu's decree, allow Gu Fuzhou to return to the capital immediately."

50

Chapter 49

The news that Gu Fuzhou was about to return to the capital was passed from Xiao Songzi's mouth to Lin Qingyu's ears. Lin Qingyu and Xiao Cheng both had the same doubts; they both thought there were too many strange things about this matter.

From the conversations of several people, it wasn't difficult to figure out that Gu Fuzhou was allowed to return to capital because of the Sky Spider poisoning. Now that the emperor was ill and delirious, whether Gu Fuzhou could return to the capital depended on what Xiao Cheng thought.

For the past few months, Gu Fuzhou has been sending letters requesting to return to the capital, all of which were ignored by the emperor. But this time, the situation was completely different. Gu Fuzhou was the heart of the army. No matter how much the imperial court was afraid of the military power he wielded, he must not be allowed to be poisoned to death at this critical juncture. If they did not allow Gu Fuzhou to return to the capital when they clearly had a way to detoxify him, simply letting the poison run rampant and kill him, Gu Fuzhou's army of 300,000 men would lose confidence in the court. It wasn't an inconceivable possibility that they might even defect.

But why was it the Sky Spider Poison? If like last time, this was the Xixia's doing, why did the Xixia use slow-acting poison from the central north. Why

not use a highly-toxic poison instead? Was it, in the vernacular of Jiang's hometown, ' not more appetizing than a pork cutlet for that kind of money'?

What he could think of, Xiao Cheng could definitely work out as well. However, matters having reached this point, in order to take care of the overall situation, even though Xiao Cheng knew there was an ulterior motive to all of it, he had to issue the order to allow Gu Fuzhou to return to the capital.

In any case, Gu Fuzhou's return wasn't a bad thing for Lin Qingyu. When Gu Fuzhou comes back, his father would definitely accompany him. It has been half a year since his father left and now their family of four could finally be reunited.

Gu Fuzhou's return to capital this time was not a return in triumph. Rather, he was coming back to get detoxified. In order to stabilize the situation, the imperial court decided to keep it secret. They conducted Gu Fuzhou's return to the capital covertly. Except for the important ministers in the cabinet, only the Imperial Hospital knew about it.

It would take ten days for the message to reach Yongliang 800 li away. Adding in Gu Fuzhou's journey to the capital, it would take about half a month still for Gu Fuzhou to arrive. During this half-month, the Imperial Hospital had to prepare the antidote for the Sky Spider Poison.

Since Lin Qingyu returned from the Eastern Palace that day, he developed a sudden high fever. He used all his willpower to prescribe a prescription for himself. He had Hua Lu make the medicine according to the prescription and

ordered Huan Tong to go to the Imperial Medical Office to apply for leave on his behalf. He then fell asleep.

The illness came down heavy like a mountain. Lin Qingyu slept, all the while feeling dizzy. He couldn't tell whether it was even day or night. In a daze, he heard someone calling his name: "Qingyu, Qingyu…"

The tone was leisurely. It carried a smile. It was pleasing to his ears.

Lin Qingyu wanted to respond to him, but he couldn't even open his eyes. It felt like a heavy stone was pressing down on his body. It took enormous effort

to even move his fingers. His throat was parched and he was unable to make a sound.

Strangely, even with his eyes closed, he could still see a vague figure. Then the voice calling "Qingyu" suddenly changed its tone, becoming the voice of another man: "Imperial Physician Lin."

Lin Qingyu finally forced himself to open his eyes. He saw the person standing beside his bed and said, voice hoarse, "Imperial Guard Shen?"

"It's me." Shen Huaishi handed to him a cup of tea. "Are you alright? You look very bad."

The herbal tea went down his throat and Lin Qingyu gradually came to full wakefulness. Dreams at night are made of thoughts from the day. He was dreaming.

Lin Qingyu probed his forehead with the back of his hand. His high fever had gone down, becoming into a low-grade one. He had regained some strength. "Why did you appear in my house?"

"I heard from the Imperial Hospital that you were on leave due to illness…" Shen Huaishi said hurriedly, "I'm here to visit."

"In the middle of the night, standing wordlessly by the patient's bed? Do all

shadow guards visit patients like this?"

Shen Huaishi's mood turned low. "I can't let others find out that I'm here. This is the only course of action possible, unwise as it is."

With Shen Huaishi's skills, let alone a mere Lin Residence, he wouldn't be discovered even if he entered the palace at night. Lin Qingyu sneered, "It's certainly true that you can't be discovered by the Crown Prince. Otherwise he

might feel he hasn't been feeding you enough so you force your way into my house for a good time."

Shen Huaishi's face flushed with shame. "His Highness turns impulsive after drinking, I…I apologize to you on his behalf."

It was like Lin Qingyu had heard some shockingly funny joke. He laughed out loud. "Apologize on his behalf? Who are you, why are you apologizing for him? Because you climbed into his bed?"

The expression on Shen Huaishi's face stiffened. "Stop-stop talking."

"Go away if you don't want to hear this." Lin Qingyu's eyes showed a bit of coldness, "I have no interest in looking at people who hold themselves cheap."

If Shen Huaizhi refuses to come to his senses and debases himself all the time, if he was dead set on Xiao Cheng, how was Shen Huaishi going to do things for him?

It had been a waste of his time to detoxify and heal Shen Huaishi. Good-for-nothing.

Shen Huaishi was silent for a long time. He said softly, "Jingchun, His Highness and I, the three of us have known each other since we were children. Jingchun had an innocent and artless temperament. She was unworldly and naive. Although she was a 'palace maid', she was delicate. She would cry whenever she felt wronged and whenever she cried, His Highness would go coax her. I

don't know how to coax people. I could only diligently practice martial arts at the Heavenly Prison Sect. I thought that that way I could protect Jingchun and His Highness forever. Later… …Jingchun was favored by the King of the North. She didn't want to be married off so she cried and begged His Highness to save her. But the imperial decree had been issued, and even His Highness could do nothing. This has always been a thorn in His Highness' heart. Ever since then, whenever His Highness encounters anything related to Jingchun, he would become violent and moody." Shen Huaishi looked up at Lin Qingyu's eyes, "Imperial Physician Lin, your eyes really look like Jingchun's. That's why His Highness lost control for a bit."

Lin Qingyu found the important point among this bunch of nonsense. "Heavenly Prison Sect? Don't the Imperial family's shadow guards come from the Tianji Camp?"

Shen Huaishi hesitated for a moment, then said, "Tianji Camp and the Heavenly Prison Sect are the claws and teeth of the Son of Heaven. Tianji camp is bathed in light and the Heavenly Prison Sect is shrouded in darkness. The world only knows about Tianji Camp, they are ignoratnt of Heavenly Prison Sect. The two are bright and dark and they complement each other.

Three years ago, the Heavenly Prison Sect was destroyed. Among the hundreds of people, I was the only one left alive."

What Shen Huaishi had said it simply but a lot of details had been hidden. Lin Qingyu asked, "Who destroyed the Heavenly Prison Sect?"

Shen Huaishi shook his head, as if he didn't want to mention the matter anymore. "In short, it was His Highness who saved me. After that, I switched to Tianji Camp and continued to serve His Highness. I thought that there were no other survivors of the Heavenly Prison Sect except me. I didn't expect to see

a jade plaque of the Heavenly Prison Sect with you." A light moved in Shen Huaishi's eyes. "Xuzhou, Suicheng… I must go and see for myself."

Lin Qingyu asked, "When are you going to leave?"

Shen Huaishi sighed: "General Gu is coming back to the capital. I can't leave for the time being."

"Why?"

"General Gu is surrounded by people from the Tianji Camp. From Yongliang to the capital, his every move, every word and deed is under His Highness's control."

Lin Qingyu found it a little strange. "You telling me this, aren't you afraid I would leak this information?"

Shen Huaishi smiled and said, "General Gu is a wise man. How could he not know that he's being watched by the Tianji Camp? But this is the condition for him to return to the capital. If he wants to come back, he can only accept it."

"Listening to your tone, it seems you admire General Gu very much."

"I am a man of the Dayu. Is there any among us who doesn't admire the country's god of war? Although he has displayed some outrageous behavior

recently…" Shen Huaishi paused. "Someone's coming."

Lin Qingyu looked towards the door, but saw no one. When he turned back around, Shen Huaishi had disappeared. After a while, Hua Lu pushed open the door and saw Lin Qingyu sitting up in bed. She said in surprise, "Young Master, you're awake!"

The window had opened at some point. The leaves rustled from the wind. It was as if no one had come.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but think, given this skill of Shen Huaishi's, could Xiao Cheng be able to beat him?

Recovering from illness was like reeling off raw silk from a cocoon. Lin Qingyu's illness dragged on for half a month before he got better. He had lost a lot of weight and he looked rather like a weak willow. A single look could arouse a man's protective instincts.

With the idea of letting Lin Qingyu have a good rest, Hu Ji took the initiative to take care of everything whenever he was on duty with him. But Chu

Zhengde couldn't bear seeing him being idle, so he sent him to the Imperial Medical Office to prepare the antidote for the Sky Spider Poison.

It was the Sanfu of June, the heat was beating down on them and wind from the valley blew. It was dusk when Gu Fuzhou quietly entered the capital.

The reason why the Sky Spider Poison had to be detoxified at the capital was because of its medical supplement— the snow lotus from the north needed to be ground into powder using the warm jade mortar. After the medicine was prepared, it needed to be taken within an hour. Warm jade mortars were extremely rare and there were only three in the entire Dayu. One was located

at the Northern border and the remaining two were in the Thousand Herb Hall of the Imperial Medical Office.

As soon as news of Gu Fuzhou's arrival in the capital reached the Imperial Medical Office, the Imperial Medical Office became very busy.

Everything was ready, only the last ingredient was missing — the medical supplement.

"Where's the medical supplement? Get the medical supplement over here!"

"Imperial Physician Lin is in charge of the medical supplement, go and find Imperial Physician Lin."

"At this important moment, where did Imperial Physician Lin go!"

Everyone finally found Lin Qingyu in the library. When Lin Qingyu learned why they'd come, he frowned. "Isn't General Gu supposed to arrive tomorrow?"

"Who told you? General Gu returned to his mansion an hour ago!"

Lin Qingyu's eyes fell on the sixth-grade medical officer who had specially come to inform him early that morning.

The medical officer also seemed to feel guilty and didn't dare look at Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu had no time to deal with him for the time being. He said,

“Give me an hour. It’ll be done right away.”

The leading medical officer’s eyes widened. “Are you only just starting to prepare the medicine now?”

“If you keep talking nonsense, it will take longer.”

After the medicine was completed, Lin Qingyu did not delay for even a second and he personally delivered the antidote to the General’s mansion.

The housekeeper of the general’s mansion was waiting for the medicine. He was so worried, his brows were beaded with sweat. Finally seeing Lin Qingyu arrive, he hurriedly took him to the inner courtyard. “General, the medicine is here!”

Without permission, Lin Qingyu could only wait outside the door.

A deep and low male voice came from within. With undisguised mockery, he said, “They certainly got here early. Why don’t they just come back next year?

That way they can also cut down the three-meter-high tree on my burial mound."

Lin Qingyu was taken aback.

This is… Gu Fuzhou? Their god of war? General Gu, an independent man of thirty?

This……

Chu Zhengde's voice could then be heard. "General, begging for your forgiveness. It was this official's negligence, entrusting this matter to a seventh-grade newcomer. When this official returns to the office, I shall make sure that he's severely punished."

"General, let us get him in here first."

Lin Qingyu's heart moved. This was his father's voice. His father's voice sounded a little tired. He mustn't have had much rest on the way to the capital.

Lin Qingyu calmed down and walked in with the antidote. He saw his father and Chu Zhengde both standing in front of a wooden armchair. A tall and imposing man was sitting in it, dressed in the black military uniform of a general. He had dashing brows and bright eyes. His face, which could not be considered fair and clear, at first glance, appeared grave and stern, with the bloodthirsty aura of a warrior. But when matched with his eyes, a greater part

of his ferocity was washed away. Instead, he gave off the feeling of an undisciplined teenager.

Sky Spider Poison was a slow-acting poisons. Gu Fuzhou had yet to reached the point when the poison has entered his internal organs. Therefore, he looked much like an ordinary person. At this moment, he was holding up his teacup, having some refreshments.

Father Lin has always been reserved but he was unprepared to see his eldest son who he hadn't seen for half a year. He couldn't hide his surprise and blurted out, "Qingyu?"

Gu Fuzhou's hand suddenly froze and he looked up. When the general's eyes met Lin Qingyu's, his eyes suddenly brightened as though dark clouds had been pushed aside to reveal the sun. There was now vigor in them.

Immediately afterwards, the general seemed a little nervous again and he hurriedly looked away.

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly at his father and then bowed to Gu Fuzhou, saying, “This official is named Lin Qingyu. Allow me to pay my respects to the general.”

Gu Fuzhou: “…”

For a long time, Gu Fuzhou did not speak. Afraid that he was blaming him for being late, Lin Qingyu added, “I have made the general wait for so long. Please forgive me.”

Gu Fuzhou didn’t look at him. Finally, he was able to get something out.

“It’s alright,” he said with a low chuckle, “I like waiting.”

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Chapter 50

Lin Qingyu was slightly startled — Just now, that wasn't what Gu Fuzhou had said. Chu Zhengde was also at a loss as to why the general's attitude changed so quickly. Father Lin was already used to General Gu's inconsistencies during

his time in Yongliang; he had long since stopped seeing it as strange. “Qingyu, serve the general his medicine.”

Lin Qingyu stepped forward. Holding up the medicine bowl, he handed it to Gu Fuzhou: “General, please take this medicine.”

The two were a little too close. Gu Fuzhou glanced at him quickly and then immediately turned his head away, his breathing becoming unsteady.

It seemed to Lin Qingyu that Gu Fuzhou was a little nervous. He didn’t know what was there to be nervous about drinking his antidote, so he asked, “Is there anything the general finds improper?”

Gu Fuzhou muttered, “…You’re too close.”

Lin Qingyu heard him. He put the medicine bowl on the table and retreated.

“Ai, that’s not what I meant… Forget it.” Gu Fuzhou seemed ashamed of his behavior but there was nothing he could do about it. So he picked up the medicine bowl and drank it clean.

Chu Zhengde said, “The antidote must be taken once a day and any residual poison will be eliminated in one month. Every day starting from tomorrow,

the Imperial Medical Office will deliver the antidote to the general's mansion. I ask that the general take it on time."

In other words, Gu Fuzhou could only stay in the capital for one month. After his detoxification was finished, he would need to return to the Northwest frontier.

"Then the question is, who will come to deliver the medicine to me every day?" Gu Fuzhou looked around and set his eyes on Lin Qingyu, "Imperial Physician Lin, can you be the one to do it?"

Without waiting for Lin Qingyu's answer, Chu Zhengde said, "Imperial Physician Lin was late in delivering the medicine today. Were it to happen another time, would this not cause harm to the general's health?"

Father Lin knew that his eldest son was not such a careless person; there must be a reason for the incident. He asked Lin Qingyu, "News of the general's

arrival in the capital today was sent to the Imperial Medical Office early this morning. Why were you late?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I was told that the general would arrive tomorrow."

Chu Zhengde furrowed his brows tightly, "By who?"

"Hong Changfeng."

Gu Fuzhou quickly cast down his decision. "Then it's that Hong Changfeng's fault. What wrong has Imperial Physician Lin done? And even if he has, he is this general's adopted brother. I am more than willing to wait for him."

Father Lin was helpless. "Since the general has said so, Qingyu, from today on, it will be up to you to come to the general's mansion every day to deliver his medicine."

Lin Qingyu nodded in agreement. He didn't have the patience to run errands, but Gu Fuzhou had been kind to him and he ought to return that kindness.

It was getting late. It was time for most ordinary people to be going to bed. Father Lin said, "General, this official wishes to visit the Lin Residence."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "As it should be. I have made my adopted father work hard during this journey. Head home and reunite with your family."

Lin Qingyu withdrew together with his father. When he reached the door, Gu

Fuzhou suddenly called him, “Qing-… Imperial Physician Lin.”

Lin Qingyu turned around. “Does the general have any other instructions?”

Gu Fuzhou hesitated to speak. Finally, he glanced at the Tianji Camp guards beside him, and said slowly, “It is nothing. I would just like to thank you for your hard work.”

Lin Qingyu said politely, “It was this official’s honor to be able to serve the general.”

Gu Fuzhou said with a smile, “It was this general who was honored.”

Lin Qingyu followed his father back home. Mother Lin had not received any news of her husband’s return. Upon seeing her husband, she burst into tears. Father Lin and Mother Lin have been together for many years, they were a couple very much in love. At this moment, their silence surpassed even a thousand words.

“Father!” Lin Qinghe ran towards Father Lin and threw himself into his father’s arms. Father Lin leaned down to catch his youngest son. He then lifted him up high. “Qinghe has gained weight.”

After a very long time, their family of four finally gathered together to eat. During the six months that Father Lin was away from the capital, too many things have happened. Lu Wancheng died of illness and Lin Qingyu separated from the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion; he then became a medical officer of the

Imperial Hospital. In the future, father and son would be working in the Imperial Hospital together; they could be regarded as colleagues.

Speaking of Lu Wancheng, Father Lin couldn't help sighing. "In the end, Young Master Hou was unable to survive past weak crown. It is a pity."

Lin Qingyu didn't feel that it was a pity. Being able to be rid of that weak and sickly body was a good thing for that person.

When Mother Lin took the sleepy Lin Qinghe to bed, Lin Qingyu asked, "Father, do you know of that phrase — 'If odd, change; if even remain the same'?"

Father Lin nodded. "This phrase was widely circulated among the Zhengxi Army. It is said that it came from a secret Xixia letter that General Gu intercepted. The general remained puzzled despite much pondering. He relayed this phrase to the Crown Prince, wishing that he would summon the

masters in the capital to resolve his confusion. However, even until now that we've been allowed to return to the capital, still no one has figured it out."

Lin Qingyu was lost in thought.

So, was that person really in Xixia?

Having been reunited after a long parting, they shared some wine. Father Lin told him a few more things, "General Gu is truly a wonderful person."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Why do say this?"

Father Lin smiled and shook his head. "You'll know after you spend a few more days with him."

Lin Qingyu also smiled. "I was really surprised when Father recognized General Gu as his adopted son."

"The general is an official of the highest rank serving our country. I am but a fifth-rank Yuan Pan of the Imperial Hospital. How could I possibly dare to be his adoptive father? At first, I refused in every possible way. Later, the general said, if I recognize him as my adopted son, the status of the Lin Residence in

the capital will be substantially different from before. It will be very beneficial to your career. It was only then that I felt relieved."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "The general truly has helped me a lot."

The next day, Father Lin returned to the Imperial Hospital. The first thing he did was to find out all the details regarding the delayed delivery of the antidote. He asked Lin Qingyu and Hong Changfeng to confront each other. Hong Changfeng insisted that he was not wrong, but that Lin Qingyu had misunderstood. They only had each other's verbal statements to go by. There hadn't been a third person present at the time. Father Lin has always been fair in his dealings. Even if he believed in his eldest son, he would not make a decision without evidence. Fortunately, the general did not pursue the matter and Father Lin punished the two with a small penalty, fining the two of them of a month's salary.

Hu Ji said, "Hong Changfeng must have been instigated by Chu Yuan Pan. Who doesn't know that these two are blood-related master and apprentice?"

"Not necessarily. It hasn't been just a day or two since Chu Zhengde has found me disagreeable. He is pedantic and stubborn and it is clear that he is targeting me." Lin Qingyu said, "It seems that he isn't the only one who dislikes me in the Imperial Hospital and the Imperial Medical Office."

Hu Ji sighed. "They say that a tall tree attracts the wind. You came up with the cure for the epidemic. You're the youngest doctor in the Imperial Hospital. You're related in some way to both the Empress and General Gu. What's more,

your father is the head Yuan Pan of the Imperial Hospital. Naturally, you would attract people's jealousy. Regardless, they should learn to draw in their claws in normal times."

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "I don't need for them to draw in their claws. I need for those idiots to provoke me less."

After the evening meal, Lin Qingyu prepared the Sky Spider antidote at the Imperial Medical Office and delivered it to the general's mansion. The housekeeper of the general's mansion was named Yuan Yin. Gu Fuzhou was away from home most of the year. With no parents or wife, Yuan Yin was usually left to take care of everything in the house.

Yuan Yin knew that Lin Qingyu would come to deliver medicine and was ordered to wait at the door early on. "The general is enjoying the shade in the backyard," Yuan Yin said respectfully. "Imperial Physician Lin, please come with me."

The summer heat was scorching and the cicadas were chirping. The handsome, tall and imposing man lay on the rocking chair. His eyes were closed and he was rocking back and forth slowly. He was extremely tall of stature and there was hardly any room to stretch out his long legs; he could only let them hang where they lay. Two pages were positioned on either side of him, holding long fans and fanning the wind for him.

Gu Fuzhou's lazy and indolent appearance seemed very familiar to Lin Qingyu. Behind him stood two imperial guards with swords by their waists.

Their temperament did not resemble that of a military officer used to fighting and marching; rather, their temperaments were similar to Shen Huaishi's. If he guessed correctly, these should be the people from Tianji Camp. Xiao Cheng had ordered the people from Tianji Camp to follow Gu Fuzhou. Nominally, they were there to guard the general but everyone knew what they were actually there for.

Yuan Yin stepped forward and said, "General, Imperial Physician Lin has come to deliver the medicine."

The rocking chair stopped and Gu Fuzhou stood up. Compared to last time, he no longer seemed so nervous. He walked to face Lin Qingyu, lowered his head and said, "You're here."

Lin Qingyu was not short but standing in front of Gu Fuzhou, he unexpectedly seemed as petite as a woman. His chin didn't even reach Gu Fuzhou's shoulder. They only thing that could be said was that Gu Fuzhou was certainly worthy of being the fierce general known as the Dayu's god of war.

"General, it's time to drink your medicine."

Gu Fuzhou drank the medicine, raised his head and sighed, "The moonlight is so beautiful tonight. If Imperial Physician Lin has nothing else to do, why not

accompany this general to drink some wine, eat some snacks and admire the moon?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment, then nodded: "Thank you for the invitation, General."

Gu Fuzhou revealed a smile. When he wasn't smiling, his face appeared grave and stern. When he smiled, it seemed to fit his face, making him look a lot younger. Gu Fuzhou ordered Yuan Yin to serve them a late-night snack. Lin

Qingyu reminded him, “It would be better for the general to refrain from drinking alcohol.”

“I won’t drink but you should.” Gu Fuzhou poured a cup of wine for Lin Qingyu. He looked on with a smile as Lin Qingyu took a sip, his eyes seemed to fill with moonlight.

Lin Qingyu frowned. He had this nagging feeling that this situation seemed familiar. “Why is the general looking at me like that?”

Gu Fuzhou coughed lightly and said, “I heard that Imperial Physician Lin has just recently gone through the pain of bereavement. Now, it seems that you are not particularly grieved?”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “He has already passed away. Those left behind should learn to look forward.”

“It is only right that you should not grieve. Grieving harms the body.” Gu Fuzhou paused and said, “Has Imperial Physician Lin ever heard the phrase, “If odd, change; if even remain the same?”

As soon as he said these words, the two guards turned to look at them.

Xiao Cheng hadn’t made this matter public. Naturally, he couldn’t reveal the cloven foot. “I have never heard of it.”

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows and said with a smile, “Is that so. That’s

interesting." He glanced at the two guards and said vaguely, "Nevermind, now is not a good time."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What does the general mean?"

Gu Fuzhou changed the subject, "By the way, were you able to get down to the bottom of the late delivery yesterday?"

Lin Qingyu briefly explained the matter. When Gu Fuzhou learned that he had been fined a month's salary, he smiled and said, "Then you must remember this animosity and pay it back tenfold in the future."

The subtle feeling of familiarity grew stronger. Lin Qingyu stared at Gu Fuzhou for a long time then said simply, "I will."

After admiring the moon for about an hour, Lin Qingyu got up to say goodbye. Gu Fuzhou rubbed his lower abdomen and sighed, "I'll get up too and move around a bit, work up a sweat."

That sense of familiarity instantly disappeared. If it were that person, he definitely wouldn't move about in the middle of summer, working up a sweat.

Lin Qingyu said, "The residual poison has yet to clear form the general's body. Please remember not to practice excessively."

Gu Fuzhou's face sank. "I'm older now. I'm no longer seventeen or eighteen when no matter what I ate or how much I slept, I wouldn't gain weight. I don't

want to move, but I want to get fat in my middle years even less." Gu Fuzhou seems to be thinking of something. His lips curved into a smile. "Adopted brother, would you like to see how I usually practice?"

To be honest, he didn't really want to. But thinking of the help Gu Fuzhou had extended to him, Lin Qingyu nodded anyway.

Gu Fuzhou's heroic manner was suddenly reaching for the clouds. "It's time for you to see my true strength. Let's go, I'll take you to the military drill grounds."

Torches were lit around the military drill grounds. However, it still wasn't as bright as it was during the daytime. Lin Qingyu asked, "Why doesn't the general practice during the day?"

"It's too sunny in the day. Only fools would train then."

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. Were people who engaged in fighting all year round still afraid of the sun?

Gu Fuzhou walked to a stone padlock and said, "This stone lock should be about the same weight as you."

Lin Qingyu: "…Oh."

"Please, watch closely." Gu Fuzhou did some light stretches, squatted down,

and lifted the stone padlock with one hand.

Lin Qingyu did him the honor of praising him, “The general is mighty.”

“Look, look.” Gu Fuzhou took a deep breath and raised the stone lock above his head again, “How about now?”

“Amazing.”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and dropped the stone padlock down with a boom. “Is this general better than your deceased husband?”

“En.”

“Compared to him, do you admire this general’s figure more?”

Lin Qingyu’s tone became somewhat lighter. “The general has his good points but I prefer my deceased husband’s type.”

Gu Fuzhou’s smile froze. “No, what’s so good about a sick seedling like him?”

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and said, “If the general has no other instructions, then this official shall withdraw.”

Gu Fuzhou laughed again, “Hey, adopted brother, what are you doing? Why are you so angry? We won’t talk about him anymore. How about I show you

how I chop these bricks barehanded as an apology?"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

In this way, for half a month, Lin Qingyu went to the general's mansion to deliver medicine every day. He understood why his father said that Gu Fuzhou was a wonderful person. But he felt that the word "weird" would be more appropriate to describe him.

For the past few days, the Imperial Medical Office has welcomed a distinguished guest – a world-famous genius doctor from the southern border.

Doctors at the southern border were experts at the use of gu and this genius doctor could be said to be the king of gu. Most of the people in central continent regard the cultivation of gu as sorcery, but the truth of the matter was different from the stories. Drugs could be divided into medicine and poison and likewise, gu could also be divided into good gu and poisonous gu. Poisonous gu could harm people and so, good gu could save people. Father Lin knew the benefits, so he wrote to the genius doctor of the southern border many times, finally managing to invite him to the Imperial Medical Office to teach his gu technique to many of the students. Father Lin hoped that the students of the Imperial Medical Office would not only learn how to use Gu to save people but also learn how to detoxify poisonous gu.

Although Lin Qingyu has read medical books, his understanding of the gu technique was limited to the theoretical. This time, the genius doctor from the

southern border was going to hold a class at the Imperial Medical Office, naturally, he would not miss it.

After this day's class, Lin Qingyu, medical books in hand, walked out of the classroom. He suddenly heard a whistle. Looking towards the sound, he saw Gu Fuzhou leaning against the railing, waving at him with a smile, still followed by the guards of the Tianji Camp.

Lin Qingyu hurriedly stepped forward and said, "Has the general come the Imperial Medical Office because there has been a flare up of the Sky Spider Poison?"

"No, I went to the palace to report to the Crown Prince and have happened to pass by the Imperial Medical Office. I just thought…" Gu Fuzhou gave an embarrassed smiled. He raised his hand and scratched the corner of his eye, "Well, I'll should drop by and pick you up after your class."

Lin Qingyu was startled – pick him up from class? He wasn't a child on his first day at school. Does he need for someone to come pick him up? And from the general's mansion to the Imperial Palace, how could he have possibly just passed by the Imperial Medical Office?

Before Lin Qingyu could answer, he found his hands suddenly empty. Gu Fuzhou had taken the medical books he was holding. His movements are so

natural, as though it was books and not the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear that he usually held.

Lin Qingyu said: “General, there is no need for you to bother.”

“It’s alright. I’m stronger than you. The strong should work harder.” Gu Fuzhou casually flipped through his book, “So, what did Imperial Physician Lin learn in school today?”

Lin Qingyu said, “It can’t be that the general is interest in medical studies.”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “No but I’m interested in everything Imperial Physician Lin has to say.”

“Southern Border Gu poisons.”

“Gu? Gu is good. Great beauties should use Gu.”

Lin Qingyu paused in his steps. He looked at Gu Fuzhou, a meaningful and probing look in his eyes.

Gu Fuzhou didn’t notice at all or maybe he noticed it but pretended not to. “Speaking of which, I’ve always wanted to light some incense sticks for your deceased husband. It is only right as your adopted brother.”

Lin Qingyu withdrew his gaze. “The general can go to Nan’an Hou’s Mansion

to pay his respects to Young Master Hou."

"Forget going to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion." Gu Fuzhou said, "Why don't we go to your residence?"

"My residence?"

"You should have a tablet enshrined in your house…" Gu Fuzhou paused, verifying uncertainly, "You do have it, yes?"

Yes, he did. But that wasn't Lu Wancheng's tablet.

Gu Fuzhou saw that Lin Qingyu's expression showed a hint of complexity that could not be understood by outsiders. His mood too became complicated. He teased, "Aren't you ashamed to say that you like his type better when you didn't even set up a tablet for him? Actually, I can understand. It was a marriage

bestowed by the Emperor and you, my adopted brother, don't really care much about my poor brother-in-law."

Brother-in-law, what kind of strange form of address is that?

Reason told Lin Qingyu that he ought to ignore words like these that were meant to provoke. But somehow, when Gu Fuzhou spoke to him in this tone, he couldn't help but want to respond. "I do have one."

"Who knows whether that is true or not?" Gu Fuzhou raised the corner of his lips, "Then take me there and prove it to me."

Thinking of the words "Jiang Dazhuang" engraved on the tablet, Lin Qingyu said calmly, "It is not very convenient to do so."

Gu Fuzhou was puzzled. "Why would it be inconvenient?"

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Chapter 51

Ever since Lin Qingyu had settled into his residence, he has never invited anyone in there, not even his family. Although Gu Fuzhou had been kind to the Lin Family, there were too many things about him that were suspicious. He was also under the constant watch of that pair of Tainji Camp guards. No matter what he said or did, Xiao Cheng would know. Taking him to his residence at this time was definitely an unwise move.

Lin Qingyu weighed the matter over and over. He said, “I am a widow. It has been less than half a year since my husband died of illness. If I were to rashly take the general to my residence, where I live alone, it will definitely attract criticism.”

Gu Fuzhou rethought his suggestion and did not force the matter. “If that’s the case, then let’s go to the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion.”

Lin Qingyu thought that Gu Fuzhou came on horseback, surprisingly, like himself, the general had come in a carriage. The two arrived at the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion. After the servants informed the master of their arrival, although the Nan’an Marquis did not come out of the mansion to greet them,

like he had done for the crown prince, he still welcomed them in front of the main hall.

It had been several months since they had last seen each other. The Nan'an Hou's complexion had indeed improved a lot. The contributions of the child in Pan Shi's belly truly cannot go unnoticed. Gu Fuzhou was a first-rank general and he, a first-rank noble. Upon meeting, they gave each other courtesy befitting an equal.

Lin Qingyu stood quietly by the side, watching the two exchange superfluous nonsense. In front of the Nan'an Hou, Gu Fuzhou's expression was stern; his words, were concise and to the point; every movement was that of a capable warrior. He now resembled the famed reserved and grim god of war of the past. Gu Fuzhou had obviously been joking and teasing just now, saying things like how a beauty should practice Gu. Not long ago, he had even been displaying his strength, chopping bricks bare-handed.

This kind of skillful ease reminded him of a certain someone once again.

Xixia, the secret code, Gu Fuzhou's strange words and deeds and his excessive show of goodwill. Was it a coincidence, him just being too suspicious or… something else.

When the Nan'an Hou learned that Gu Fuzhou had come to pay homage to Lu Wancheng, he didn't feel very gratified. Instead, he looked worriedly at the two

guards behind him. “The general is very considerate. Steward, lead the general to the ancestral hall. I must attend to court so I won’t accompanying you.”

Gu Fuzhou nodded lightly, “Master Hou, please don’t let us keep you.”

From beginning to end, Nan’an Hou regarded Lin Qingyu like empty space. Evidently, he was still brooding about the misfortune he had brought upon their house as a male wife. He had no wish to interact with him at all.

Their group headed to the Lu Family’s ancestral hall. Gu Fuzhou looked “Lu Wancheng’s Memorial Tablet” at the lowest level. The corners of his lips moved slightly, as though he wanted to laugh but felt that he shouldn’t. In the end, he simply sighed and said nothing.

A servant lit six sticks of incense and handed them over. Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou each held three sticks. Standing side by side in front of Lu Wancheng’s memorial tablet, they bowed three times in unison. Gu Fuzhou inserted his incense sticks into the incense burner first. He then turned sideways to make way for Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu stepped forward and said softly, “There are guards followings the general wherever he goes. Is it not annoying having one’s words and deeds all under the eyes of others?”

Gu Fuzhou seemed completely helpless. “It cannot be helped. The crown prince feels I have ulterior motives behind my urgent return to the capital. Perhaps he feels I’m here to make contact with someone and together, we’ll set

something big. It's fine, let them follow. At least it can dispel the crown prince's doubts and restore my innocence."

"The general is being overly anxious." The guard said, a wooden expression on his face. "The general was poisoned and the poisoner has yet to be caught. His Highness sent us to accompany the general his protection."

The guard had been standing behind them. Lin Qingyu was not at all surprised that they had clearly heard them despite the fact that he had kept his voice extremely soft. It was said that every member of the Tianji Camp was capable and extraordinarily skilled.

Gu Fuzhou smiled indifferently. "Alright. If that's what the Crown Prince says."

Lin Qingyu's heart moved. He felt like that Gu Fuzhou's words signified something. "The general wishes to clear the suspicions on himself. However, won't coming in such an overt manner to the Imperial Medical Office to find me bring the Crown Prince's suspicions on myself? He might think I'm the very contact you're supposed to meet."

Gu Fuzhou restrained the smile on his face. "I have no wish to implicate you either. However, are you not my adopted brother? Getting closer to you is but normal. An innocent person's innocence naturally shines through. There is no need for Imperial Physician Lin to worry too much."

An innocent person's innocence naturally shines through. The premise being that the innocent person was actually innocent or at least the innocent person

should believe himself so. He must not have anything that others could use against him, leaving an opportunity that others might exploit.

Lin Qingyu asked again, “What the general means to say is that his anxiousness to return to the capital is only for the detoxification and nothing else?”

“What nefarious thoughts could I possibly have? I simply wish to preserve my life and enjoy a few more years in happy, leisurely retirement. After all, no matter how daring I may, I woulnd’t dare not do anything to deceive the Emperor. That would be a capital offense.”

“The northwest is in turmoil, the country is divided and the people on the frontier are struggling to survve. This general has already journeyed to gates of hell once. When I returned, my head was filled with thoughts of living in ease and comfort. How could I be worthy of the trust of the court and of the country’s people?”

“Others might not know it, but I know it well in my heart.” Gu Fuzhou laughed softly, “It is only through luck that I’ve been able to win my battles. Five consecutive victories is all good and well but sooner or later, I have no doubt I will be met with consecutive defeats. Neither the court nor populace should misplace their confidence in me. I no longer wish to be responsible for millions of lives. I truly am tired. The incompetent should quickly be made to

take off one's armour and return to the land. Only in this way can I truly avoid letting the populace down."

Lin Qingyu disagreed. Gu Fuzhou's incompetence is false. What was true was that he wanted to laze around.

He really was…seeming more and more similar.

After paying his respects to Lu Wancheng, Gu Fuzhou parted ways with Lin Qingyu.

Gu Fuzhou got into the carriage, and the groom asked him, "Is the general going back to the mansion?"

The groom waited for a long time. When the general did not respond, he was about to ask again when he heard a voice from inside the carriage, "No, I still have someone I wish to meet."

With the coming of summer, not only did the emperor's condition not improve, rather it became increasingly grave. The imperial physicians were helpless. Even the recently returned Lin Yuan Pan could not provide a solution.

"His Majesty's headache has been a perennial problem. For decades, we have been able to treat the symptoms but not the root cause. Ordinary prescriptions

no longer have an effect on the Emperor's body. His condition has become even more serious from how long this illness has persisted."

The empress stayed by the emperor's bed, heart burning with anxiety, "Is there really no way?"

Lin Yuan Pan said hesitantly, "This…"

Xiao Cheng said, "If you have something to say then say it."

"Today, a miracle-working doctor from the southern border had been invited to the capital to give lectures at the Imperial Medical Office. Among the things he mentioned was the use of Gu to penetrate the brain in order to eradicate the root cause of headaches…"

"Absolutely not!" The queen said without even a moment's thought, "Using a Gu upon the Emperor's person! Saying such a thing, are you looking for death!"

The imperial physicians knelt down and said, "Asking Her Majesty to quell her anger."

Xiao Cheng looked down at the Lin Yuan Pan said with a sneer. "It is true what they say; like father, like son. The two Imperial Physicians Lin of the Imperial Hospital are so courageous. Lin Yuan Pan has been following after Gu Fuzhou for so long and has even accepted him as an adopted son. Is it possible that

you've grown stupid and ignorant like some in the army? Do you know only how to look after General Gu and not the Son of Heaven?"

Lin Yuan Pan broke out in a cold sweat. "This humble official dares not."

The empress said sharply, "Do not mention this matter again. Withdraw."

"Wait a minute, I haven't finished speaking. What is the empress mother's hurry?" The corner of Xiao Cheng's lips ticked up. "Hear Gu's command, for your propensity for blabbing nonsense and for wanting to use the Gu technique of the southern border on the emperor, starting today, you will be downgraded to a sixth-rank limu."

A limu of the Imperial Hospital was clerical official responsible for the management of the medical books and materials. They have no real power and were not allowed to make patient visits.

The Empress felt the punishment inappropriate. Lin Yuan Pan was the best physician in the Dayu, to disallow him to treat patients was a waste of his considerable talent. She opened her mouth to speak, but was stopped by Xiao

Cheng with a raising of his hand. “For a mere imperial physician, empress mother need not spend so many words.”

Lin Yuan Pan kowtowed and said, “Your servant kowtows in thanks to Your Highness.”

The empress closed her eyes and endured. No matter how unwilling she was, she could only swallow the words back. The emperor was unconscious from illness. At this time, the crown prince could naturally run unbridled, shutting the sky with one hand.

“Your Highness,” Xue Ying walked in from outside, “The leader of Tianji Camp requests and audience.”

Xiao Cheng said, “Let him wait in Qinzheng Hall.”

There was a sadness in the empress’ heart. Whether it is the old eunuch beside the emperor, or the Tianji camp for the emperor’s eagle dogs, they are all looking forward to the prince. The prince is really…not far from the throne.

In the Qinzheng Hall, the leader of the Tianji Camp gave a detailed report of Gu Fuzhou’s movements to Xiao Cheng. “Today, General Gu left his residence for the first time since his return to the capital. First, he went to the Imperial Medical Office, saying that he was there to pick up Imperial Physician Lin from school. The both of them then the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion to pay their respects to Young Master Hou. The Nan’an Hou only said a few words to him

and before leaving in a hurry. Finally, General Gu went to the Fourth Prince's Mansion once again."

Xiao Zhan narrowed his eyes. "Xiao Jie?"

In the years during the battle for succession, apart from him, who won a complete victory, only two princes managed to escape unscathed. One was the foolish son born to the queen, and the other one was the fourth prince, Xiao Jie.

Although Xiao Jie was not a fool, he might was well be one — he was an attractive but useless dunce. His biological mother was born of humble origins; he himself was unable to earn his father, the emperor's favor; he had been unfit even to join the battle for succession.

Xiao Cheng asked, "What did they talk about?"

"They exchanged polite greetings. General Gu recounted lots of interesting battlefield stories and the fourth prince listened with great interest. He invited the general to come back another time to eat roast sheep and have a drink."

Could it be that Gu Fuzhou did everything possible to return to Beijing because of Xiao Jie? No, Gu Fuzhou knew that someone was watching, so what

they saw on the surface was just what Gu Fuzhou wanted them to see. So was Gu Fuzhou trying to purposely muddy the waters to hide his true intentions?

“Continue to watch him.” Xiao Ting said, “Report immediately if he does anything unusual.”

News regarding Father Lin reached the Imperial Hospital and Lin Qingyu immediately took leave and returned to the Lin Residence. He thought that his father would be unhappy after being reprimanded. He didn’t expect for his father to be calm. He even laughed as told Mother Lin that he would now be able to go home on time every day.

Lin Qingyu was helpless. “How can Father laugh at this?”

Father Lin found joy in the bitterness. “It’s nothing more than going from fifth rank to the idle position of the sixth rank. It’s nothing. Speaking of which, before returning to the capital, the general had already reminded me to be careful of the Crown Prince. I was careless in my eagerness to help the emperor.”

Lin Qingyu was slightly surprised. “The general told you to be careful of the Crown Prince?”

“Yes. He said he was eager to return to the capital and because of it, he had no choice but to rouse a lot of suspicions. The Crown Prince would surely be wary of the people around the general. I didn’t expect I would be demoted because of this. Qingyu, you and I have both seen the effectiveness of the

southern border Gu medicines. It can cure the illness of common people but not of the Son of Heaven. — It is a pity, truly regrettable.

Lin Qingyu wasn't in any state of mind to be thinking about the southern border Gu poisons. He replayed Gu Fuzhou's words over and over again and seemed to catch hold of something. Like seeing a flower through the fog, from start to finish, he could not see it clearly.

There were two possibilities as to why Jiang wouldn't come to make himself known — he was physically far away or he had no choice but to conceal his identity. Was there another possibility–

"Well, now is not a good time."

"I don't want to involve you either."

Lin Qingyu pondered for a long time and asked, "Father, you said that the message 'if odd, change; if even, remain the same' came from a Xixia secret

letter that General Gu intercepted. Besides General Gu, has anyone seen that secret letter with their own eyes?"

Father Lin didn't know why his eldest son was asking such a question. He said, "Given its secret nature, the general naturally wouldn't show it to others."

"So, not even General Zhao has seen it?"

Father Lin said, "I don't know about that."

Lin Qingyu's eyes moved slightly.

Perhaps, he had made a mistake in the beginning. The source of the secret letter was not in Xixia, but in… Yongliang.

The next day, Lin Qingyu went to the general's mansion to deliver medicine as usual. As soon as he got off the carriage, Yuan Yin greeted him and said, "Imperial Physician Lin, the general is not at the mansion today."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Then where is he?"

"The general is at the Fourth Prince's mansion." Yuan Yin said with a smile, "If Imperial Physician Lin would give the medicine to me? I will send someone to the general."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "No need, I will simply head there

myself."

There were rules in the palace. Save for the crown prince, all adult princes were not allowed to reside in the palace. in the future, when the crown prince ascends the throne, these princes may be conferred with the title of king and moved to fiefdom. And this fourth prince had just turned eighteen this year.

Lin Qingyu got off the carriage and saw dozens of horses stopped in front of the Fourth Prince's Mansion. These horses were all majestic; they looked to be warhorses from the military camp. It seemed that Gu Fuzhou was not the only military official who came to the Fourth Prince's residence today.

Lin Qingyu explained his intention and the servant entered the residence to pass on the message. Not long after, a handsome man with a gentle and reserved appearance walked out. Judging from his clothes, he should be the steward of the mansion.

"Greetings to Imperial Physician Lin." The steward said, "Please come with me."

Lin Qingyu followed the steward all the way to the back garden where even from a distance, he could already smell the aroma of wine and meat. I saw a bonfire in the garden and a large sheep was roasting over it. There were dozens of people around the fire, most were dressed in armor and uniform, with drink in one hand and meat in the other. Only two people could be regarded as refined. One was a young man dressed in brocade. The young man was born with rosy lips and white teeth, cute and quick-witted. Although he

was also tearing mutton in his hand, his movements were not too rough. This person must the fourth prince, Xiao Jie.

Another refined man was Gu Fuzhou. Sitting among the crowd, his straight brows were stern, his silhouette, robust, giving off a chilly aura. When he saw Lin Qingyu, the chill dissipated and he raised his cup to him with a smile.

The steward announced, “Your Highness, General, Imperial Physician Lin is here.”

“I heard that there was a beautiful imperial physician in the imperial hospital. I suppose that must be you.” Xiao Jie blushed, “You really are a beauty.”

A military official said carelessly, “Why he is even more beautiful than the previous number one beauty, Princess Jingchun!”

“Old Wu, you’ve had too much to drink. How could a man compare to a woman…”

Gu Fuzhou said, “Imperial Physician Lin is here to deliver medicine to me. Come here.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Could it be that the general has drank wine?”

“No.” Gu Fuzhou took the initiative to present the wine cup to Lin Qingyu for

him to inspect, “I’ve been drinking tea instead of wine.”

Lin Qingyu looked behind Gu Fuzhou. The guards of the Tianji Camp were still there, but their faces are extremely ugly. It could even be described as shamed and humiliated. Soon, Lin Qingyu knew the reason.

“General Gu has finally made it back to the capital and yet, there are people following you wherever you go. The general has a good temper. Were it me, I would have lost my temper long ago. What is this, house arrest?”

Gu Fuzhou said, “My request to return was all too sudden. It is only normal that the Crown Prince has his suspicions about me.”

“Suspicions need to be backed by evidence! It’s been more than half a month and we have not seen a single hair of evidence. Why is the Crown Prince send people to watch the general?”

“The Crown Prince has always been close to those overly pedantic civil court officials and guarded against our military. Has he forgotten who fought has for and defended the river and mountains of the Dayu!”

Gu Fuzhou’s expression changed. “General Wu, watch your words.”

“What I dare to say right here, right now, I dare to say tomorrow in the morning court! General Gu has fought for 16 years and has made countless

military contributions. Why should he suffer such humiliation! This is too oppressive, I can't stand it!"

"Me too!"

"Tomorrow, we shall advise him together. The Crown Prince cannot treat the general like this!"

"That's right! That's right, at the very least, have the Crown Prince watch over all of us dozens of brothers. We shall see who would be willing to work themselves to the bone for him in the future!"

"Ai, ai, ai. Don't get too excited." Xiao Jie was caught in the middle. He seemed to be at a loss.

Gu Fuzhou's expression was solemn: "Today, His Highness, the Fourth Prince organized this feast just for the sake of us brothers. If you persist in making such rebellious remarks, we might as well all disperse."

"F*cking damnit!" The general surnamed Wu threw his cup to the ground and said in a fury, "I, Third Brother Wu, refuse to accept this! I'm going to the palace right now!"

Gu Fuzhou shook his head and sighed, "All of you are uncontrollable. "After speaking, no matter how excited the military officers became, he said nothing

more.

Lin Qingyu sat beside him, watched him drink his medicine. He said, “When the Crown Prince is put under pressure, he will have to clear the general of all suspicion, he will withdraw the Tianji Camp guards. At that time, the general can then speak freely and do whatever he wants. “

Gu Fuzhou made face as though he’d just had a sudden realization. He said with a low laugh, “It seems so. I didn’t even think about that. Imperial Physician Lin is so smart.”

Lin Qingyu’s heart moved. He lowered his eyes and smiled as well. “Not quite as smart as the general.”

53

Chapter 52

In recent years, the emperor has grown close to the civil servants and guarded towards the military generals. These upright and honest men have long felt oppressed in their hearts. Most of them have candid, straightforward personalities. If it was one, they would never say two. The reason why they have endured until now was because General Gu, whom they admired, warned them to put the country and the people first, that they should put aside matters of their own honor and disgrace.

Now, the crown prince had gone far and beyond; unexpectedly keeping a surveillance over the commander general, restraining him. How could this possibly be tolerated? The military officers present took advantage of the wine to discuss the matter of forming a group to offer advice tomorrow. Lin Qingyu's furrowed upon hearing it.

The brains of these military officers seemed to be focused solely on marching and fighting. They weren't perceptive enough of court matters. They also didn't understand the prudence of carefully weighing their words and

watching their expressions. Rashly offering advise, he was afraid they might not even out-talk those civil officials close to the crown prince.

At this time, Xiao Jie interrupted them, laying bare the truth with a single remark, “But you’ve never won an argument against a civil official.”

The generals: “…”

Xiao Jie added, “Every time you would all get so angry that your face all the way to your neck would flush. None of you know how to hold back your words for very long.”

Lin Qingyu looked at Gu Fuzhou. The man still hadn’t said a word, his face was calm and serene. But Lin Qingyu kept feeling like the other actually wanted to say so much, he was almost bursting with it.

After some discussion, they finally decided to play it by ear. In short, they must save the commander general from utmost misery and return to him the respect and honor he deserved.

Early the next morning, General Wu dismounted at the gate of the palace, ready to attend court. He heard someone calling him, “General Wu.”

General Wu looked back and saw that it was the beautiful imperial physician he had seen at the Fourth Prince’s Mansion yesterday. The beautiful imperial physician was wearing the indigo-colored uniform of a civil official. He stood

quietly by the side. That he was here on his own, relying on his own strength, raised his favorable opinion of this civil official.

General Wu drew back the corner of his lips in a smile and said simply, “Is Imperial Physician Lin looking for me?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Will the general still be offering advice regarding General Gu’s matter later in court?”

“I must.” General Wu said without the least hesitation, “I have made a promise with my brothers.”

“Then I ask that the general remember this. No matter what the civil officials say, you just have to use ‘And then; And so; Really? I don’t believe it. What you said is reasonable but I won’t listen.’… These are enough.” Lin Qingyu said , “Do not try to reason with them and pay no attention to what they say.”

“And then, And so, Is this true?…” General Wu slowly savored the taste and a smile blossomed on his suntanned face. “Wonderful! This is simply wonderful! This is sure to infuriate those old fogeys!”

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, “This is what I learned from my deceased husband. I hope it may prove helpful to the general.”

Apart from Gu Fuzhou, the military official with the most prestige was Wu Guogong, who was nearly eighty years old. Wu Guogong once saved the life of the late emperor on the battlefield and was awarded the title of duke of the

first rank. Wu Guogong had been enjoying retired life for many years. Hearing about Gu Fuzhou's situation in the capital, he put on the precious sword bestowed to him by the late emperor and came out once again.

Under Wu Guogong and General Wu's lead, today's morning court was livelier than the market. The civil officials had learned from Tianji Camp last night that the military officials were planning something and they had come prepared. As soon as General Wu raised this matter, they began to enumerate all the things that were suspicious about Gu Fuzhou.

The battle in the northwest was at a stalemate and General Gu had been fighting well in battle when he suddenly sent dozens of letters in succession, asking to "return to home and retire of old age." His reason was simply too frivolous. Could he simply let go of the three hundred man strong Zhengxi Army just because he no longer wanted to? Then, he brought out this secret Xixia code which put the general under suspicion of spreading military secrets. Of course, the crown prince believed in General Gu's innocence but in order to stop all the objecting voices — besides, what had to be investigated needed to be investigated — His Highness had the Tianji Camp's guards follow the general closely. At the same time, they would be able to ensure the general's safety.

Military generals had none of the civil ministers' eloquence but what they lacked in eloquence they made up for in the loudness of their voices. No matter what the civil officials said, they would use just a few short words to sally back and forth. The crown prince's closest confidants among the civil ministers' words were like flowers cascading from the sky, their mouths had

gone dry from their many speeches. But in the end, all they would get back from the other party was a light: “Really? I don’t believe it.”

When asked why General Wu didn’t believe it, General Wu would add, “I can’t tell you. In any case, what you said sounds strange.”

The Chief Minister was already old. Moreover, he had a proud and unyielding character. Hearing what General Wu said, he choked, unable to come out with a breath. He almost passed out in the middle of the hall.

Xiao Cheng was seated on the armchair below the dragon throne. His face was as black as the bottom of a pot. His fingertips tapped against the armrest and his posture showed that he was anticipating trouble. After the Chief Minister was carried out of the hall, through gritted teeth, he finally said, “Enough.”

Everyone stopped and turned to look at him.

Xiao Cheng took a deep breath. “Allow Gu to consider this matter.”

These generals may be straight-forward in character, but that didn’t mean they were stupid. They all knew that when the crown prince said this, he was planning on dragging out the matter, preferably until Gu Fuzhou left the capital.

And so, they made even more of a ruckus. Even after morning court, the matter remained unsettled; one after another they went to see the crown prince. All these people possessed military merits. One or two were nothing

but with dozens of them uniting, Xiao Cheng could not even reprimand them. The only thing he could do was avoid them. When the military officials saw this, they divided into two groups. One group wrote letter after letter to the crown prince, advising him regarding this matter. The other group took a page out of the civil officials' book; they knelt at the door of Qinzheng Hall, insisting they would remain kneeling until the crown prince granted them an audience.

The palace was in chaos but General Gu's mansion was a scene of good times and a stable world.

The wind carried in sweet fragrances; the sound of dew dripping onto bamboo could be heard clearly. There were two sun loungers by the pond, a sunshade stood behind them, providing shade. When Lin Qingyu came to deliver the medicine to Gu Fuzhou, Gu Fuzhou was holding a fishing rod, lying on the

sun lounger to fish. Iced red grapes, fished out of the well water, were within easy reach.

“Imperial Physician Lin.” Gu Fuzhou took the straw hat off from the other lounger, “It must have been hot on the road. Sit down and have some fruit.”

Lin Qingyu looked at the crystal clear water droplets on the red grapes. He picked one up and said, “My short-lived husband, like the general, loved to eat iced things in summer.”

Gu Fuzhou’s chewing cheeks stopped.

Lin Qingyu pretended not to see it and continued on, “Unfortunately, he was so weak that he couldn’t even eat anything cold. Last year, in his greediness, he ate a few red grapes, fell ill and almost died.”

Gu Fuzhou laughed softly: “That… sounds miserable.”

“If there is an afterlife, I hope he has a healthy body. Maybe then he can eat all the iced red grapes in summer to satisfy his cravings.”

“That’s probably possible.” Gu Fuzhou said, “They say the more you lack, the more you want. Maybe once he reincarnates, he’ll eat the things he couldn’t eat before. He’ll eat them until he’s filled to bursting.”

In this way, Lin Qingyu seemed to understand why Gu Fuzhou had insisted

that he watch him lift the stone padlock.

……Silly.

Lin Qingyu watched Gu Fuzhou eat mouthful after mouthful of red grapes, and said, “Eating fruit at night will make you fat. General Gu will need to double his training today.”

Gu Fuzhou drooped a bit when he heard this. “I’m training. Fishing is also a kind of exercise.”

“Did you move?”

Gu Fuzhou turned his wrist. “I moved.”

Lin Qingyu warned: “A 30-year-old isn’t like a teenager. If you let go even a little, you might put on weight. Given the general’s figure, if the muscles in your body become fat, are you not afraid that you won’t be able to marry a wife in the future?”

Gu Fuzhou was silent for a long time. He covered his face with his hands and said, sounding pained, “Don’t talk about it anymore, Imperial Physician Lin. I’ll lift weights later.”

As the two were talking, the fishing rod shook. Gu Fuzhou’s eyes lit up and he skillfully pulled and lifted the rod. “Before, I didn’t understand why my father

liked fishing so much. But now I can understand." Gu Fuzhou sighed, "It's so much more fun than cuju and polo. And you won't get tired doing it."

Lin Qingyu asked, "The general was born an orphan. So where did this father come from?"

Gu Fuzhou gave a mysterious smile. "Where do you think?"

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "I can't say."

"Of course, I mean my adoptive father. Your father."

Lin Qingyu nodded in cooperation. "My father really does like fishing."

Lin Qingyu watched Gu Fuzhou spent a long time catching a small loach. He got up to take his leave. "Once the general has handled matters, you may come to my residence to pay your respects to my deceased husband."

Gu Fuzhou's eyes lit up brighter than when he'd caught that fish. "Alright."

The military officials had been kicking up a fuss for two days but Xiao Cheng still had not relented. It could be seen that in the future, he would be an overly-conceited monarch for whom his word was law. This matter now went beyond the issue of withdrawing the guards from Gu Fuzhou; it now became a matter regarding all the military officials of the Dayu. Xiao Cheng dared to make such an obstinate ruling when he was just crown prince, not even the emperor yet.

In the future, when he ascends the throne, how would the generals have any good fruit to eat?

Lin Qingyu passed by the Qinzheng Hall from a distance and saw a large group of people surrounding the door. Surprisingly, some of them looked as though they were ready to have emperor abdicate. No matter how tough Xiao Cheng was, he wouldn't last long.

When his shift was over, Lin Qingyu went directly to the Imperial Medical Office. Since his father's demotion and with Gu Fuzhou being investigated, many people in the Imperial Hospital openly cast him subtle looks. They used to gossiped in private, but now they talk loudly in his presence. Fortunately, they didn't have the actual guts to do anything and Lin Qingyu simply regarded them as though they didn't exist.

Under the guidance of the genius doctor from the southern border, Lin Qingyu had already started to practice some simple Gu techniques. He was staying in the Thousand Herb Hall late into the night when he suddenly heard the sound of a medicine cabinet being opened. He had a vague guess as to who

it was. He took the candle holder and went to have a look. Sure enough, it was as he had expected.

“Imperial Guard Shen.”

Seeing him, Shen Huaishi automatically put his hands behind his back, his eyes wandering, “Imperial Physician Lin.”

Lin Qingyu looked him up and down. “Are you injured again?”

Shen Huaishi’s expression was strange. “No.”

“Then what are you doing in the Thousand Herb Hall?”

For the shadow guards of the Tianji Camp, injuries were commonplace. Most of Shen Huaishi’s tasks need to be carried out in secret. Sometimes, it was inconvenient to seek the aid of an imperial physician. And so, they would come to the Imperial Medical Office to get some medicine for their wounds. Having said that, Lin Qingyu knew of no other shadow guard who could freely

enter and exit the Imperial Medical Office except for Shen Huaishi. It was said that this was a privilege given to him by the crown prince.

Shen Huaishi faltered and could not come up with an answer. Lin Qingyu spread out his hand in front of him. “Take it out.”

Shen Huaishi: “…”

Come to speak of it, it was strange. Lin Qingyu was obviously just an imperial physician. He had no martial arts skills, he would not be able to stand even a

single blow from him. But standing in front of him, stared at by those cold-blade-like eyes, he silently took out the item he'd hidden behind his back.

It was a small jar of ointment. With just a single whiff, Lin Qingyu already knew what the ointment was used for.

Lin Qingyu stepped forward and pulled Shen Huaishi's collar aside. He saw that his collarbones were covered with red marks. He said coldly, "Is he so rude to you in bed?"

Shen Huaishi took two steps back, covered his neck and blushed. "Imperial Physician Lin…!"

"Come here." Lin Qingyu returned to his position and took out a silver needle from the medical box. "Give me your hand."

Shen Huaishi stretched out his hand without clearly knowing why. Lin Qingyu pierced Shen Huaishi's fingertip with the silver needle, and bright red blood

flowed into the Gu tray. Lin Qingyu observed for a moment, then said in surprise, “You’re not infected with a Gu.”

Shen Huaishi asked, “Why does Imperial Physician Lin think I’ve been infected?”

“You’re still so wholeheartedly devoted to and deeply in love with the Crown Prince even though he treats you like this. I can’t think of any other reason other than the Infatuation Gu in your body.”

Shen Huaishi smiled wryly. “Imperial Physician Lin, why do you always… look down on me?”

Lin Qingyu looked at him. “I’m not the one looking down on you. You’re the one looking down on yourself.”

54

Chapter 53

Although Lin Qingyu didn't regard Shen Huaishi as a friend, he still understood his experience. Shen Huaishi and Xiao Cheng had known each other since they were children. He practiced martial arts to protect Xiao Cheng and he had already placed himself in the position of loyal servant. He was an obstinate man and Xiao Cheng had saved his life. So, towards Xiao Cheng, he was naturally submissive and utterly obedient.

In all fairness, Shen Huaishi was a very qualified servant. But what he wanted wasn't Xiao Cheng's loyal servant; rather, he wanted a chess piece that could kill Xiao Cheng. At present, he had tried many times but to no avail. It could be seen that if were to use Shen Huaishi's abilities for himself, the stimulation of words was far from enough. What was needed was a powerful medicine.

Met with Shen Huaishi's silence, Lin Qingyu didn't bother to go on. "Show me your injury."

The ointment that Shen Huaishi had taken was usually used by concubines in the palace after they've been favored for the first time. From this, it could be

surmissed that Shen Huashi's injury was in some place that was too embarassing to mention.

Shen Huaizhi suddenly raised his head. The redness that had just faded from his face climbed up again. He was too shocked to speak.

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "As a doctor, there's nothing I've never seen."

Shen Huaishi stood up abruptly and said quickly, "It's just a minor injury. I still have something to do…"

"Even with your physique, you've already reached the point where you had to come to tbe Thousand Herb Hall to get medicine. That just means that your injury definitely isn't light. There is no need for you to mind, I'm not gay." Lin Qingyu said, paused unconsciously and vaguely felt that something wasn't quite right.

Shen Huaishi almost knelt down and begged Lin Qingyu to stop talking. "Thank you, Imperial Physician Lin, I'd better go ahead." As soon as he turned around, he heard a male voice from outside the door. "It's already so late in the evening. Who's talking there?"

Lin Qingyu recognized the voice as coming from sixth-grade medical officer Hong Changfeng. He and Hong Changfeng had a quarrel because of the delay in delivering the antidote. Before, Hong Changfeng was relatively restrained. Since Lin Qingyu's father was demoted, Hong Changfeng no longer concealed his hatred for him — constantly dropping "male wife" in front of him,

assigning him shifts in the evening, sending him to deal with tasks that ordinary people wouldn't want to do, such as seeing the worst-tempered taifei in the palace or letting him take on the comparatively disgusting sicknesses.

Lin Qingyu had no particular opinion on this. Hu Ji's influence was probably rubbing off on him, now, he felt the same towards all patients; even if it was a

slave, it was still a life. But if Hong Changfeng wanted to pick a fight with him beyond these matters, he wasn't going to back down.

Sure enough, as soon as Hong Changfeng saw him, he put on a look. "It's already past the curfew, what are you still sneaking around the Thousand Herb Hall for?"

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "The Emperor has allowed me to enter and leave the Imperial Medical Office freely. Do you know the meaning of 'freely'?"

Hong Changfeng was dumbstruck, unable to reply. Not wanting to lose face, he pointed a finger at Shen Huaishi. "Who are you, and what are you holding in your hand?"

Shen Huaizhi pursed his lips. Apparently, he didn't want to reveal his identity. Lin Qingyu said, "He's my friend."

Shen Huaishi was momentarily stunned looking at Lin Qingyu's profile, a gleam of brilliance appeared in his always submissive eyes.

Hong Changfeng thought he finally had something on Lin Qingyu and hurriedly blurted out, "The Emperor allowed free entry and exit to the Imperial Medical Office but not your friends. Lin Qingyu, you brought in an

unauthorized person in the middle of the night and you even let your friend to take things from the Thousand Herb Hall. Have you no respect for the rules?"

Shen Huaishi opened his mouth to explain, but was stopped by Lin Qingyu, "This was my negligence. Tomorrow I will go to Chu Yuan Pan to bring a bramble and ask for punishment. Shen Xiong, put the medicine back first."

Hong Changfeng smiled smugly. "You'd better go yourself, otherwise don't blame me for disregarding any friendship I may have for a colleague."

After Hong Changfeng left, Shen Huaishi said, sounding guilty, "I'm the one who got you involved."

"Not necessarily." Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, "Maybe you've just helped me out."

Shen Huaishi wondered, "Helped you out?"

"Whether you have or not depends on how much the Crown Prince cares about you."

Shen Huaishi said in a low voice, "How could His Highness care about me?"

Lin Qingyu made no comment. "We'll know once we test it."

The next day, Lin Qingyu was in the Imperial Hospital and Hong Changfeng kept staring at him. During lunch, he didn't forget to remind him "kindly",

“Imperial Physician Lin, when are you going to go to the Chu Yuan Pan to be punished?”

Lin Qingyu didn’t even look at him. “I’ll go now.”

Chu Zhengde didn’t sit with the ordinary imperial physicians in the Imperial Hospital; he had a room of his own. Not long ago, this room had been Lin Qingyu’s father’s.

Lin Qingyu knocked on the door, heard a “come in”, pushed the door and entered, “Chu Yuan Pan.”

Chu Zhengde was writing a prescription for the emperor and even if he wrote til his hair turned while and fell out, he couldn’t come up with anything fresh and useful. He held back his frustration. Seeing that it was Lin Qingyu, naturally, he had no good expression on his face. “Oh, what a rare guest.

Imperial Physician Lin has never shown any respect for laofu. For you to come see me, you must have something important to discuss."

Lin Qingyu wasn't there to talk nonsense. He went straight to the point, "I have a method, which may make His Majesty's condition improve."

"You?" Chu Zhengde glared at him, "What could you possibly do?" Without waiting for Lin Qingyu to answer, he said, "Could it be that, like your father, you want to use Gu on the sage?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Chu Yuan Pan should know clearly in his heart whether the Southern Border Gu technique is of no use or not."

The old fogey's mystifying demeanor diminished somewhat. "The Central Plains are a long way from the Southern Border and when common people hear of Gu, they immediately reject it. Also, there was that matter of an imperial concubine plotting to kill the previous Emperor using Gu. His

Majesty remains ruler of his land, how could the Empress and the Crown Price possibly let those dirty things into His Majesty's body?"

"If that 'dirty thing' becomes a dead thing and then you smash it into powder and use it as medicine, although the effect is not as good as that of a living Gu, it can still relieve the suffering from a headache."

Chu Zhengde sneered, "For young people, running their mouths is always so easy. There's no medical supplement, no prescription. You dare let His Majesty use a dead Gu, what is the difference between this and regicide?"

"Together with the doctor from the Southern Border, we've already found a suitable medical supplement and formulated a prescription." Lin Qingyu took out from his sleeve the results of his work during the past few days with the Southern Border doctor. "This is the prescription and dosage."

Chu Zhengde was stunned. He looked at Lin Qingyu in disbelief, then grabbed the prescription, looking at it hungrily.

"Chu Yuan Pan can test the medicine first and then make his decision after." Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Then, I shall withdraw."

While Lin Qingyu and Chu Zhengde were talking, Hu Ji went to the Eastern Palace. Xiao Cheng has been troubled by the military officials' remonstrance recently and hasn't been able to sleep for the past two days. When paying his respects to Concubine Chen this morning, Concubine Chen saw that his

complexion was not good and ordered Hu Ji to go to the Eastern Palace to perform a check-up.

Hu Ji examined Xiao Cheng's pulse and said, "His Highness is fine but listless because of too little sleep. This official will prescribes a soothing medicine for His Highness. Your Highness should be able to sleep better after taking the medicine."

Xiao Cheng closed his eyes and raised his hand to signal Hu Ji to step back. Hu Ji spoke up again, "This humble official, has another matter to report to His Highness."

"Oh?" Xiao Cheng opened his eyes and said slowly, "You, an Imperial Physician, what matter could you have to report to Gu?"

"Last night, Imperial Guard Shen came to the Imperial Medicine Office to get medicine but he was kicked out by Imperial Physician Hong Changfeng. Imperial Guard Shen's injury seemed to not be light and walked very awkwardly. Later, when this humble official asked, I found out that he was one of His Highness' men." Hu Ji He took out a box of ointment from his medicine

box, “This humble official was worried that Imperial Guard Shen might delay his medication because of this so I brought the medicine over here today.”

Xiao Cheng was in a bad mood. Hearing that his shadow guard was being bullied outside, a sullen look appeared between his brows and he said coldly, “So there was such a thing.”

Hu Ji said respectfully, “Imperial Physician Hong was also unaware of Imperial Guard Shen’s identity and thought him a thief who had made his way in. This is the reason why there was such a misunderstanding.”

Xiao Cheng had vented on Shen Huaishi yesterday. He didn’t expect that Shen Huaishi hadn’t even taken any medicine yet. “What an idiot.”

In the Imperial Hospital, with neck stretched out, Hong Changfeng watched as Lin Qingyu come out of Chu Zhengde’s room, looking forward to a good

show. Unexpectedly, what he got wasn't any sort of show but an order from the crown prince.

"Hong Changfeng has been remiss in his duties and has disrespected the Crown Prince. Henceforth, he is relived of his post as Imperial Physician, never to be appointed again."

Hong Changfeng's eyes widened and he collapsed to the ground. Before he could even realize what had happened, he was already being dragged out by two eunuchs.

In the blink of an eye, the generals have already been kicking up a fuss for three straight days. Many of civil officials couldn't bear it anymore and they advised the Crown Prince to stop his investigation on General Gu for the sake of the stability of the court. After investigating for so long, nothing has been found, instead this matter has thrown the court into a turmoil; insisting on this course of action truly wasn't sensible. However, the crown prince was also stubborn, full of youthful vigor. He didn't like being forced to give in, reckless and desperate to protect his majesty as the crown prince. And so, the matter was at a stalemate.

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou talked about this matter and Gu Fuzhou said, grieving and lamenting, "How could they embarrass the Crown Prince like this? I heard that the Crown Prince was so angry because of this matter that he needed to be seen by an imperial physician. If the Crown Prince were to meet

some unexpected misfortune, how am I to face the people of the land. The only think I'd be able to do is to apologize with my death."

The two Tianji Camp guards guarding the door silently glanced at each other.

The first few times Lin Qingyu delivered the medicine, Gu Fuzhou was standing. Later on, he was usually sitting. Today, Gu Fuzhou…was lying down.

Lin Qingyu said: "General, get up and drink your medicine."

Gu Fuzhou, who was now finished grieving and lamenting, said in a lazy tone, "Imperial Physician Lin, please bring the medicine over here."

Lin Qingyu brought the medicine to his bedside. Gu Fuzhou propped his head up. He didn't even fully rise. He finished his medicine in a half-up position, then handed the medicine bowl back to Lin Qingyu, laying back peacefully.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but ask, "How long has the general slept today?"

"I've been in bed since lunch."

"Then where did you have your dinner?"

Gu Fuzhou winked. "In bed."

Winking, this move, appearing on the grave and stern face of a tall and imposing thirty-year-old tall man was…Lin Qingyu couldn't bear to look at it

directly. “General, you can’t go on like this. This would be fine if you were a sick child. Right now, you’re strong and healthy. How can you stand just lying here everyday with nothing to do. Don’t tell you really want to be a cripple?”

“To tell Imperial Physician Lin the truth, even since I was able to take back my life back from Lord Yama, I have had an epiphany.”

“What did the general realize?”

“If a person’s dream is only to be a good-for-nothing, then what is the difference between him and being free from all care and anxiety?”

“…”

Gu Fuzhou let out a drawn-out sigh. “You don’t know my past days have been. I wake up earlier than a rooster and sleep later than a dog. I suffer hardships from my subordinates during the day and when I can finally sleep at night, I’m met with sneak attacks from enemy troop. There isn’t a moment that I can spend in bed. I’m forced to get up and run for my life. Can you imagine that kind of suffering?” Gu Fuzhou emphasized again, “I can’t stay in bed for even a moment!”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t help but smile. “It serves you right.”

Gu Fuzhou looked at him and smiled, somewhat unable to help it. Though he clearly knew that the threat had yet to be completely lifted, he still called out

the name that he had been thinking of for as long as he had been living, “Qingyu…”

Lin Qingyu’s chest grew hot. He knew it wasn’t the best time, but he couldn’t help but answer him, “…Hm?”

“You’ve lost a lot of weight.” Gu Fuzhou didn’t want to make the atmosphere too sad and he added with a smile, “While I’ve gotten much stronger. Are you angry?”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

He was angry — so angry that he wanted to poison Jiang and make him wilt once again.

55

Chapter 54

Lin Qingyu watched Gu Fuzhou finish his medicine and he even examined his pulse for him afterwards. “The Sky Spider Poison in the general’s body is almost completely gone. There should be no side effects.”

Gu Fuzhou had been anticipating it for a long time and said indifferently, “Your father stayed by my side in Yongliang, so of course, there couldn’t possibly be any problems.”

Lin Qingyu heart moved slightly. There was something he’d always wanted to ask Gu Fuzhou, but… Lin Qingyu glanced in the direction of the door and said, “It’s getting late, this humble official will be going back first.” At the end, he didn’t forget to remind him, “General, you must remember to lift your weights.”

Being stared at by two pairs of eyes from the Tianji Camp, Gu Fuzhou could only let him go no matter how reluctant he was. “Alright,” he said, sounding as though he had nothing to live for, “I’ll lie down for another hour and then I’ll go and lift weights.”

Lin Qingyu stood up. He heard movement from outside the door. Another person from Tianji Camp had come. Seeing this, Gu Fuzhou sat up from the

bed, his tone containing faint excitement. “It’s not yet time for them to change guards.”

If it wasn’t to change the guards, then…

They saw the newcomer say something to the two and the three of them together entered and knelt down in salute to Gu Fuzhou. One of them said, “His Highness the Crown Prince has strengthened the defenses around the capital, adding more patrols. The security of the General’s Mansion will be taken care of by the guards in the future. We will be returning to the Tianji Camp.”

Lin Qingyu breathed out a long sigh of relief. He felt like a wide panorama had opened before his eyes. Gu Fuzhou smiled slowly, “You’ve all worked hard. Take care, I won’t be seeing you out.”

As soon as the Tianji Camp guards left, before Lin Qingyu could say anything, the man behind him scooped him up and embraced him into his arms, forcing him to sit on the bed.

When Gu Fuzhou first returned to the mansion, the bed was still a hard plank bed. He couldn’t bear this kind of grievance and immediately had Yuan Yin

change it to a big bed. It was piled with soft beddings and was even covered with cool silk. Sleeping on it in summer, it was both soft and cool.

However, Lin Qingyu only felt the softness. Gu Fuzhou's body was like a stove. Held in Gu Fuzhou's arms, his whole body felt hot.

"Qingyu, I'm back." Gu Fuzhou said, voice deep, "I'm sorry, I'm so useless. I got back late."

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and lightly patted Gu Fuzhou's back. "I know. You've been working hard."

"All that hard work was useless. I still wasn't able to come back on time." Gu Fuzhou was brooding over this matter and he couldn't help but swear, "Damn

that Xiao Cheng! He truly is worthy of being the protagonist. He's so f*cking hard to fool – forget it, let's not talk about him. Hugs first."

The arms around Lin Qingyu increased in strength. Lin Qingyu was hugged so hard that he could hardly breathe. Just as he was about to ask Gu Fuzhou to let go, he heard him sigh, "This heart is beating so fast…"

Lin Qingyu instinctively retorted, "Mine isn't."

"I meant mine." Gu Fuzhou said contentedly, "But this time, no matter how fast my heart beats, I won't faint."

Memories flooded into his heart and Lin Qingyu also laughed. "Well, if you don't let go, I'll faint."

Only then did Gu Fuzhou let him go. Gu Fuzhou sat cross-legged on the bed and Lin Qingyu sat by the bedside. The two stared at each other for a while under the dim candlelight. Gu Fuzhou was first to lower his eyes. With his current complexion, even if he blushed, Lin Qingyu wouldn't be able to tell.

Lin Qingyu carefully looked at Gu Fuzhou's current face. He had a robust silhouette and deep facial features. It was a completely different style from that of the previous handsome son of nobility. Only those eyes remained dazzlingly brilliant, bright like stars.

Lin Qingyu saw that there was a shallow scar on the end of his eyebrow; it missed his eye by the barest bit. This mark looked very new. He must have

gotten it two or three months ago.

Lin Qingyu raised his hand, stroked the scar with his fingertips and asked, “How did you transmigrate into General Gu?”

Gu Fuzhou sighed. “I don’t know, I was quite frightened when I woke up.”

The time he woke up after his first death, he saw a classical beauty in a wedding dress. The second time, he saw a burly man in a tent. The gap was simply too big and with the poison circulating in his body, he almost died on the spot. It was not until he faintly caught sight of his father-in-law that he knew that he was still in the Dayu, that he was still in a world with Lin Qingyu in it.

His strong desire to survive kept him going for that two additional days that his father-in-law needed to find the antidote and pull him back from the gates of hell.

“Generals who are deployed to the battlefield cannot go back to the capital without an imperial edict. They can’t even write a letter to their family. I knew that I wouldn’t be able to go back within a short amount of time, so I first recognized your father as my adoptive father and mentioned this matter in my report. My thinking was that once Xiao Cheng knows that you are my adopted brother, he shouldn’t do anything excessive to you.”

Lin Qingyu remembered all the things that happened in the past half a year and said, “My identity as General Gu’s adopted brother has indeed saved me

from a lot of trouble." But that was only when Xiao Cheng was sober. On Jingchun's birthday, after getting drunk, Xiao Cheng had wanted to use force on him. If it wasn't for Shen Huaishi, he probably wouldn't be able to see Gu Fuzhou right now.

"Later, I kept begging to go come back to the capital but those two idiots, the emperor and Xiao Cheng, just wouldn't let me." Speaking of this, Gu Fuzhou grew furious. At that time, his heart was burning with anxiety. He suffered insomnia for the first time in his 18 years of life. He couldn't sleep well all night and he lost a lot of his hair because of it. "Before I knew it, it was soon going to be a hundred days since my death. I had no choice but to find a way to let you know first that I'm still alive."

Lin Qingyu said, "So, there was never any secret letter from Xixia. You made it all up."

"That's right. But when I returned to the capital, I noticed that ordinary people had never heard of 'if odd, change; if even, remain the same'. I knew then that Xiao Cheng hadn't done as I asked. When I asked you the secret code under

the watchful eyes of Tianji Camp, you calmly said that you'd never heard of it. I guessed that you must have known about it early on."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "I heard this code from a little eunuch in Qinzheng Hall on the hundredth day since your passing"

"It took til the hundredth day for you to hear it?" Gu Fuzhou felt a little distressed, "Then were you very sad at the time?"

Lin Qingyu paused. "It was fine."

Gu Fuzhou looked at him. "Did you cry?"

Lin Qingyu shook his head.

Gu Fuzhou breathed a sigh of relief and said with a smile, "What a cruel heart, Imperial Physician Lin. You didn't shed even a single tear for me."

Lin Qingyu said softly, "You came back, didn't you?"

"It's me, I'm back again." Gu Fuzhou gave a boundless sigh. "From now on, I will be by your side and live a life of leisure until I die."

At the word "leisure", Lin Qingyu didn't know whether to be moved or be dumbfounded. "Since you've already sent the secret code to the capital, why were you so anxious to come back? You should know that your actions were

too suspicious and given how overly-suspicious Xiao Cheng is, he definitely won't let you go."

"I know, there wasn't anything I could do about it. First off, I couldn't guarantee that the code would have reached your ears; second…" Gu Fuzhou

hesitated, “I vaguely remembered that Princess Jingchun’s birthday is in summer.”

Lin Qingyu’s expression changed slightly. “I should have died on the day of Jingchun’s birthday, right?”

“How did you…?” Gu Fuzhou widened his eyes, “Did Xiao Cheng lay his hands on you?”

“En.” Lin Qingyu’s tone contained a trace of grievance that even he himself didn’t notice, “He grabbed my arm.”

Gu Fuzhou let out a “f*ck” and asked, “Which arm?”

Lin Qingyu stretched out his left hand. “This one.”

Gu Fuzhou held his arm in his arms and rubbed a couple of times. “Did he touch you anywhere else?”

“No.” Lin Qingyu sneered, “In the middle of trying to force me, he changed targets and forced Shen Huaishi instead.”

Gu Fuzhou was silent. Thousands upon thousands of words came together into one phrase: “That – piece – of – dog – sh*t.”

“How did I die originally?” Lin Qingyu asked, “Was it by Xiao Cheng’s hand or

was it by Shen Huashi's sword?"

"You wanted to die with Xiao Cheng but halfway through Shen Huaishi appeared. He blocked the fatal blow for Xiao Cheng. When you saw that your assassination attempt had failed, you didn't hesitate to swallow the poison you'd prepared…" Gu Fuzhou couldn't go on. Even if it was just the original plot, he still couldn't accept it.

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "It does sound like something I would do."

Gu Fuzhou said regretfully, "I should have made up my resolve to come back sooner."

"When you said 'made up your resolve', did you mean to letting my father give you the Sky Spider Poison?"

Gu Fuzhou confessed bitterly, "I didn't want to, but if I hadn't, I wouldn't have been able to come back at all."

Lin Qingyu's Adam's apple bobbed. "Nonsense."

Gu Fuzhou smiled. "Your father helped me control the dosage of the Sky Spider Poison. As long as I could return to the capital on time, it would have been fine. Don't worry, everything was within my plan."

Everything including being monitored by the Tianji Camp; he had also expected it. In fact, Tianji Camp hadn't started monitoring him just when he

returned to the capital. He had sent dozens of letters of resignation in a row, which already aroused the suspicion of the emperor and Xiao Cheng. Back then, the shadow guards of Tianji Camp had already infiltrated Yongliang and had followed him ever since.

He thought about making himself known to Lin Qingyu as soon as he came back. Even under the eyes of Tianji Camp, it wasn't impossible to forcibly make themselves known to each other. But Xiao Cheng was thoroughly investigating the people around him and he had already gotten his father-in-law involved. He didn't want to throw suspicion onto Lin Qingyu as well, so he had to endure for the time being.

It was a pity, the feeling of missing someone wasn't something that he could hide and with how smart Lin Qingyu was, in the end, he still recognized him. Lin Qingyu knew the current situation and did not act rashly. The two of them

had been acting with tacit understanding for so long and it was only now that they were able to free themselves.

Lin Qingyu was silent for a moment and asked, “You did all this, even taking on the risk of poisoning yourself, just to come back to see me?”

Gu Fuzhou said without hesitation, “If not for that, then for what?”

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes, turned his head and stopped looking at him.

“Qingyu?”

“…”

Gu Fuzhou saw that the corner of Lin Qingyu’s eyes were red. For a while, he was at a loss. Then, he smiled, “Actually, it’s not entirely for you. Didn’t I tell you? My days in Yongliang have been so hard and tiring. I had the lives of the 300,000 troops of the Zhengxi Army weighing down on my shoulders. Even when I tried loafing on the job, my conscience would feel uneasy. If I had to suffer another day of that, I think a year would have been shaved off my life.”

He took hold of Lin Qingyu's hair and played with it in his hand. "My desperate return was also for my own sake."

Lin Qingyu's rare feelings of tenderness disappeared instantly. "As expected of you."

"It's me, it's me. So don't be sad, don't cry."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "I didn't cry when you died, why would I cry now that you're alive."

For the past several months, Gu Fuzhou had been a duck driven onto a perch. He knew the importance of retreating when the enemy advanced and advancing when the enemy retreated. If Lin Qingyu was doing all that he

could to remain calm and composed; he had to expose him. “Someone’s eyes are red, but I won’t tell you who.”

Lin Qingyu: “…” This person really hadn’t changed at all.

At this time, Yuan Yin hurriedly ran in. “General, someone has come from the palace. He says that the Emperor has ordered you to have an audience with him.”

Gu Fuzhou was taken aback. “His Majesty? Are you sure it’s the Emperor, not the Crown Prince?”

“It is undoubtedly from the Emperor.”

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu. “Isn’t the Emperor seriously ill?”

Lin Qingyu stood up and calmly straightened his official uniform, “I saved him.”

56

Chapter 55

When the emperor was seriously ill, the Ministry of Rites was already preparing for his funeral. Unexpectedly, Chu Zhengde changed his prescription and after drinking it, even before two days had passed, his condition improved and the emperor woke up.

The current emperor was without fault but also without merit. He has been on the throne for more than 20 years but had yet to make any great achievements but neither has he dissipated the family fortune. He, in his mediocre manner, guarded the country left by his ancestors. Although he was the suspicious sort, he was diligent in state affairs. As soon as he woke up, he summoned the Crown Prince to ask him about the situation of the court while he had been ill.

There weren't any matter worth noting, only Gu Fuzhou's matter was quite troublesome. Before the Emperor even woke up, Xiao Cheng had already been pressured into withdrawing the Tianji Camp guards beside Gu Fuzhou. However, the military officers still refused to stop. After learning that the

Emperor had awoken, one after another, they filed petitions asking for an audience.

Lying on the dragon bed, the emperor flung Wu Guogong's memorial at Xiao Cheng's feet. "Look at what you have done!"

"I fail to see what I've done wrong." Xiao Cheng looked ahead and said stubbornly, "There is plenty about Gu Fuzhou to be suspicious about. If we are unable to find out the truth, how could we possibly let him roam free in the capital? Father, could it be that you really trust him?"

The emperor said angrily, "You still don't know what you've done wrong!"

Xiao Cheng knelt down and said, "I ask my Imperial father to make clear to me my fault."

The emperor shook his head. "You, sigh, you are still too young."

When it came to being suspicious, the emperor wasn't any better than Xiao Cheng. But in any case, having sat on the throne for so long, he was well versed in the art of checks and balances. In everything, one must but the general interest first. That Gu Fuzhou was suspicious was true. But they were a long time away from having a falling out with Gu Fuzhou. Although Gu Fuzhou was physically in the capital, he remained the heart of the army officers and the three hundred thousand strong army in Yong Liang. Apart

from him, the Dayu could never find another god of war who was victorious in every battle.

The Dayu and Xixia have been at war so many years, almost emptying the country's coffers, countless soldiers have died in battle. In the face of hostilities in the northwest, all others had to be set aside. Even if Gu Fuzhou was dubious and arrogant, so long as he can win battles, it wasn't time to move against him. After matters in the northwest was settled, it would then be time to settle accounts with him, turning over old accounts one by one. Was there any fear of him not being convicted?

The emperor saw through people clearly. He knew that Xiao Cheng's methods were tough, unwilling to admit defeat, haughty and arrogant. When he ascends the throne in the future, he would never take the road of a wise monarch convincing people with virtue and readily accepting good advice. Even if he

could rule the world strictly, once he loses the heart of the generals, even if there were thousands of troops, what would be the use?

The emperor's illness has already left him mentally and physically exhausted. After scolding Xiao Cheng a bit, he couldn't get his spirits up again. He called out, " Cheng'er."

Xiao Cheng's eyes narrowed. He couldn't remember the last time the emperor called him that.

"Carefully ponder the hearts of the people." The emperor said, "Other peoples', as well as your own."

The human heart was nothing but the most useless thing in the world. Xiao Cheng lowered his head and sneered silently, "Thank you, imperial father, for your guidance."

Xue Ying said, "Your Majesty, General Gu is here."

The emperor summoned all his willpower to hang on and said, "Let him in. Cheng'er, you stay. You will join Zhen in placating Gu Fuzhou."

Xiao Cheng took a deep breath. "Yes, Father."

After a while, Gu Fuzhou, led in by the eunuch, walked into the hall. The tall and lofty man was dressed in military uniform, a dark red cloak behind him, a

chill surrounding his body.

Gu Fuzhou was about to kneel and salute when the emperor smiled and said, “There is no need for Aiqing to be so polite. Xue Ying, give him a seat.”

Gu Fuzhou said, “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Seeing the emperor’s smiling face, Gu Fuzhou had a guess as to the reason why the emperor, instead of letting him talk over candlelight to Lin Qingyu, insisted on calling him into the palace in the middle of the night.

The emperor first asked about his health. Learning that the residual poison had been cleared, he seemed even more gratified. He then continued on to mentioned the matter of the guards from Tianji Camp, saying that the crown prince’s original intention had been to protect him. Who would have thought that it would attract the dissatisfaction of the military officers?

“This is the first time the Crown Prince has been put in charge of the country. It is inevitable that there would be matter he would be negligent of. Now that the matter is settled, I trust the Aiqing will reassure the military officers.”

The emperor’s remarks sounded as though he were showing care for his subject; when in fact he was protecting his son. He had no choice but to admit

that, ginger truly does get spicier as it gets older. Gu Fuzhou nodded lightly, speaking reservedly, voice deep, “This official understands.”

The emperor coughed twice, took the tea handed by Xiao Cheng and said, “Speaking of which, Aiqing is already thirty.”

“This official is thirty-one this year.” Gu Fuzhou had a bad premonition. Generally speaking, after being asked one’s age, one is usually urged to marriage.

The emperor smiled and said, “Ah, thirty-one. When I was your age, I already had several princes. Zhen has kept you in the northwest and delayed your marriage.”

Even the words he used to urge him to marry was exactly the same as he had expected. Gu Fuzhou said, “The situation in the northwest is unstable. This official has no intention of settling down for now.”

“You mustn’t say that. With you out on expeditions throughout the year, there is no one left at home.” The emperor thought about it and said, “My Seventh Princess at the prime of her youth. What do you think, Aiqing?”

Xiao Cheng quickly understood the emperor’s intentions. By betrothing the princess to Gu Fuzhou, firstly, it could appease the military officials and let

them know that Dayu placed great importance on General Gu. Secondly, placing a wife beside Gu Fuzhou was much more useful than a guard.

Xiao Cheng said with a half-smiling smile, “To tell father the truth, seventh sister has admired General Gu for a long time. She will definitely not object to this marriage.”

Gu Fuzhou flat-out refused. “I appreciate the seventh princess’ admiration but this official already has someone he likes.”

“Tell me, who’s the young lady? Zhen can sanction your marriage.”

…and here we f*cking go again. If you like giving away marriages so much, then stop being an emperor. You should go a career change and be a matchmaker.

Gu Fuzhou said: “Then, I don’t have one.”

Xiao Cheng said coldly, “Gu Fuzhou, do you think this some trifling matter? If you say there is, then there is and if there is none, then there is none?”

The emperor scolded, “Crown Prince.” He then said gently, “Since there is no one, I will have you and the Seventh Princess meet another day. If you two

cannot agree to a bond, I will ask the Empress to let you choose one that you like among noble ladies. No matter which one you like, I will support you."

Gu Fuzhou was about to refuse once more, but the emperor coughed, not giving him a chance to speak. "I'm tired. Aiqing should withdraw."

The emperor's condition had taken a turn for the better. After a few days of recuperation, he was able to get up and sit. Chu Zhengde had taken the lead in this matter. The emperor wished to reward him greatly, but Chu Zhengde told the emperor that he had not been the one to prepare the new prescription. Rather, it was made by the seventh-rank imperial physician, Lin Qingyu.

The emperor seemed to have an impression of this name. He asked, "Is he the male wife who came up with the prescription for the epidemic?"

Chu Zhengde said, "It is he."

The emperor has been ill for so long. Someone who was able to treat him must be a rare talent. Who cares whether he was a male wife or not? "Then, deliver my word. Lin Qingyu is to be promoted to fifth-grade imperial physician."

In the Dayu, the highest position in the imperial hospital was that of fifth-grade Yuan Pan, followed by the fifth-grade Yuan Pan and other fifth-grade imperial physicians. Lin Qingyu had saved the emperor's life and he directly

rose three ranks. He was already on equal footing with Chu Zhengde. His official position was equivalent to that of Imperial Censor.

When Lin Qingyu went to the emperor's sleeping quarters to thank him, a male attendant was accompanying the emperor. The attendant was only sixteen or seventeen years old and he was as slender as a woman. Seeing him sitting at the emperor's feet, his head resting on the emperor's lap, appearing lovely and well-behaved, it seemed he was more of a pet.

When the emperor saw Lin Qingyu, he hesitated, "Zhen…has seen you before?" If he had seen such a face, how could he have no impression of it at all?

Lin Qingyu said, "Half a year ago, this official was fortunate enough to have laid eyes on His Majesty."

The emperor looked at him for a long time, and said, "From now on, you and Chu Zhengde together will attend to Zhen."

To attend to the emperor meant that he would have to go with Chu Zhengde to diagnose the emperor's pulse, administer acupuncture, and prescribe prescriptions every day. He had in effect became part of the emperor's inner circle. But when he thought of the look in the emperor's eyes, Lin Qingyu wished that Chu Zhengde had simply taken the credit for himself. It was a pity that although the old fogey had different political views from his own, he was

also a very principled person and disdained taking away credit for the younger generation.

At the end of the day's shift, Lin Qingyu walked out of the Imperial Hospital and saw Gu Fuzhou standing against the palace wall, his arms folded, his face gloomy and his head bowed, thinking who knows what.

"General."

Gu Fuzhou stood up straight and smiled. "Imperial Physician Lin."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Why is the general here."

"The Empress invited me into the palace to enjoy the flowers. After the viewing, I decided to drop by the Imperial Hospital to pick up Imperial Physician Lin from work."

Why was the empress suddenly inviting Gu Fuzhou to enjoy the flowers? The last time she invited someone to enjoy the flowers was when she was choosing a concubine for Xiao Cheng.

The two waved back the eunuch who had come to lead the way. They walked to a place where there was no one else. Gu Fuzhou hesitated, "Qingyu."

"What?"

Gu Fuzhou took a deep breath and asked in a low voice, "Would you be willing

to marry me?"

Lin Qingyu paused. "What?"

Gu Fuzhou put his hands together and put it before his forehead, "Please do me this favor. Take me as your wife."

Lin Qingyu looked at him, considering. Without any hesitation, he said, "No."

Gu Fuzhou had already guessed that Lin Qingyu would refuse. However, he still choked and asked, unwilling to give up, "Why not?"

Lin Qingyu was completely perplexed. "Why should I marry you?"

Gu Fuzhou tried to brainwash him. "I took you as my wife once. Don't you want to take me as your wife now and get back your dignity as a man?"

"I don't really want to."

Gu Fuzhou seemed to don on a mask of suffering. "But if you don't marry me, the Emperor is going to bestow a marriage upon me again."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "Again? Marriage?"

Gu Fuzhou told Lin Qingyu that the emperor wanted to betroth the seventh princess to him. It turned out that the flower viewing the Empress had

arranged today was to set up a meeting between him and the seventh princess.

Lin Qingyu smiled, but it didn't reach his eyes. "Isn't this good? You're not gay. That is, you like women. The seven princesses has the countenance of a flower, with a face like the moon; gentle and considerate and of golden branches and jade leaves as well. She is more than your equal."

"That won't work." Gu Fuzhou said solemnly, "My actual age is only eighteen. In my hometown, men cannot get married until they are at least twenty-two."

"If that's the case, why are you willing to marry me again?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "If it's you, even an early marriage and early childbirth is nothing – just let the law punish me, I'm fine with it."

Lin Qingyu's expression grew rather uneasy. Gu Fuzhou climbed up the pole: "Imperial Physician Lin, think about it. Wouldn't taking the god of war as your wife afford you great respect?"

"No, I won't marry you." Lin Qingyu said coolly, "General Gu is already dead, his soul having gone to who knows were. You have occupied his body.

Refusing to continue his glory as god of war is already bad enough. Now, you want him to have to shoulder the title of 'male wife'?"

"I don't have much of a choice either." Gu Fuzhou was so dejected he began to resort to sophistry, "You saved the Emperor. Now, he's forcing a marriage on me. You should be responsible for me."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "I can't believe you have the face to say that. If I hadn't saved the Emperor and allowed Xiao Cheng to smoothly ascend the throne, your situation might even be sorrier now."

Gu Fuzhou sighed. "Alright, then go do your own thing. Don't worry about me, I won't stress you out even more. It's okay, I can find a way to solve this myself. I'm very good."

Lin Qingyu frowned, "Can you not use General Gu's face to make such a pitiful expression? When a man takes on a husband he is also made to put on make-up, put on a bride's headdress and tasseled cape. If you were still Lu Wancheng, it would have been fine. But now you are Gu Fuzhou. Using General Gu's body to put on makeup, painting a huadian between your brows —" Lin Qingyu imagined the scene, and the corners of his mouth twitched slightly, "I'm afraid that once I lift the veil, I will be subjected to a nightmare."

Gu Fuzhou was startled. He never imagined that Lin Qingyu would reject him not because he "wasn't gay" or because "two men marrying was against the Will of Heaven" or because "a wife should be a virtuous person, you are too lazy" or any other such reasonable objections; rather it was because… he

thought him wearing a bridal attire with a huadian on his forehead would look ugly?

Gu Fuzhou savored Lin Qingyu's words and probed carefully, "You don't want to take a wife but are you willing… to marry again?"

Lin Qingyu looked pensive. "Perhaps there are still other ways."

Gu Fuzhou met his eyes that concealed excitement. He knew that the big beauty was going to do something bad again.

"Tonight, come to my house." Lin Qingyu said.

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Chapter 56

Lin Qingyu returned to his residence. He told Hua Lu and Huan Tong that there would be a guest coming tonight. Since the establishment of this residence, no guest has been to it. Huan Tong guessed that the guest would be Hu Ji and Hua Lu said it would be a relative of the Lin Family.

“Neither.” Lin Qingyu said, “It is my adopted brother, General Gu.”

Huan Tong was overjoyed to hear it and Hua Lu’s face flushed with excitement. In the Dayu, Gu Fuzhou was a god of war, known by all. Many of the men and women their age worshipped Gu Fuzhou. There was no need for Lin Qingyu to say more. The two of them happily got busy, preparing the wine, tea and snacks for the guest.

Lin Qingyu remembered something, and asked Huan Tong, “Is the thing I asked you to order ready?”

“Yes, it’s already in the study.”

After Lu Wancheng’s death, he was still able to enjoy the lighting of incense from the Lu Family’s ancestral hall. However, the famous and honored General Gu had gone without anyone knowing that he had already laid down his life for the country, unable to enjoy the worship of later generations. Since Gu Fuzhou claimed to have gotten the chance to be reborn from saving the life of

a pregnant woman, then General Gu, a good soldier who had saved countless lives, must have also gone to be reborn in another world. Regardless, Lin Qingyu still asked Huan Tong to order a blank stone tablet to be enshrine in the dark room behind the study.

It was getting late. Though it was already after dinner time, Gu Fuzhou had yet to be seen. Huan Tong who'd been keeping watch at the door was looking around expectantly. In the end, it was Yuan Yin that he led inside. Yuan Yin told Lin Qingyu that Wu Guogong suddenly visited the general's mansion with a couple jugs of good wine, wanting to drink and reminisce with the general. Wu Guogong was an elder and he has expended a lot of effort regarding this matter with the Tianji Camp. The general could not refuse and said he would be late in coming over.

"The general also said that if it is getting too late, Imperial Physician Lin should not wait for him and go to bed first."

Lin Qingyu thanked Yuan Yin and went to the study after dinner. Although Gu Fuzhou told him not to wait, how could he fall asleep knowing that Gu Fuzhou would come?

It wasn't until late in the night, nearing the end of haishi that Lin Qingyu suddenly heard a whistle and knew that a certain someone had arrived. It

stood to reason that if Gu Fuzhou had arrived, Huan Tong would announce his arrival. He had no idea what the hell that man was up to.

Lin Qingyu walked out of the study, and saw a black figure jump over the wall. Moving like drifting clouds and flowing water, he landed steadily on the ground. Gu Fuzhou clapped his hands and said, "Good evening, Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu was expressionless. "Why did you have to climb over the wall? It's not as though I didn't leave the door unlocked for you."

"What's so interesting about walking right through the front door when you're visiting a widow's house? Since we're pursuing excitement, then we've got to follow it through to the end."

"…Who said we're pursuing excitement?"

Gu Fuzhou asked knowingly, "It's not for the pursuit of excitement, why would Imperial Physician Lin be inviting this general to visit his residence in the middle of the night?"

Thinking of how pitiful this person's last life had been, Lin Qingyu took a deep breath and tried his best to restrain his temper. He said patiently, "It's inconvenient to talk in the palace during the day — come here."

Lin Qingyu's house was more than a little bit smaller than the Nan'an Hou's Mansion and the General's Mansion. Gu Fuzhou looked around and said, "I've

given you so much property, you could have bought a mansion as big as the Nan'an Hou's."

Lin Qingyu said, "And be accused of overstepping my authority by the Imperial Censor? There's only a handful of people in my house, why would I need to make it so big?"

The two headed to the study. The study had two rooms, an inner and outer room. The outer room was lined with bookshelves, and the long table in front of the window was where Lin Qingyu spent his time hunched over his books. If he got tired from reading and writing, he could go to the inner room to rest for a while. As soon as Gu Fuzhou entered the inner room, he saw the bunk bed he had designed for him and Lin Qingyu to sleep in.

Gu Fuzhou was momentarily stunned, and then he laughed out loud. "Why'd you bring this here too?"

Lin Qingyu said, "The place didn't come furnished with a bed."

He wasn't counting on Gu Fuzhou to believe such a clumsy lie.

With Gu Fuzhou's current height, standing on the ground, he was much taller than this bed. He reached out and touched the silk quilt on the top bunk. In the

past, Lin Qingyu slept here and accompanied him through nights of being tortured by illness.

Gu Fuzhou turned to look at Lin Qingyu and smiled.

His pupils were dark but his eyes were bright, reflecting Lin Qingyu's face. Under his gaze, Lin Qingyu felt inexplicably uneasy.

In addition to the smell of pen, ink, paper and inkstone, there was also the faint scent of medicine in the study.

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and said softly, "Didn't you drink with Wu Guogong. Why isn't there even the slightest smell of alcohol on your body?"

Gu Fuzhou curled his lips. "I took a shower before I came to see you. You know how much I value you."

"Is it important to take a bath before seeing me?"

"Yes," Gu Fuzhou said as though he were simply stating the truth, "this is the highest courtesy."

He wanted to show his best side to Lin Qingyu and he constantly worried that he didn't appear handsome enough in front of him. He was very strange. He

considered himself to be someone of passable appearance, but there were times when he wasn't confident in the face of the person he liked.

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "This is the first time I've heard of such a statement."

Gu Fuzhou's breathing gradually became unstable. The effect of Wu Guogong's wine was pretty strong. He had felt fine after drinking, but now it was starting to rise to his head. Gu Fuzhou sat down on the bottom bunk, supported himself by propping his arms behind him. He said in a lazy tone, "Qingyu, I'm a little drunk."

Lin Qingyu said, "Should I make you some sobering soup?"

Gu Fuzhou shook his head. "Sobering soup is useless. Let's get down to business first. Even Wu Guogong has heard about the matter of the Emperor wanting to betroth the Seventh Princess to me. He kept congratulating me as we were drinking, saying he would accept my future son as his disciple. Is there any way you can make the Emperor change his mind?"

Lin Qingyu calmed his mind and said, "The Seventh Princess is the Emperor's youngest daughter, and the Emperor has always regarded her as the pearl in his palm. You are a great general, brave and skilled in battle, having great achievements in battle; Pairing you with her, naturally, you make the ideal

couple. But if you were suffering from some hidden disease, the Emperor naturally wouldn't be willing to marry her to you as a grass widow."

Suffering from some hidden illness? A grass widow?

Gu Fuzhou reacted and stood up suddenly, saying in disbelief, "Lin Qingyu, are you trying infuriate me to death?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "No."

Gu Fuzhou said enigmatically, "Alright then. I thought you were trying to get me to drop dead from anger so you could go find yourself a girl to marry."

"If I wanted to find a girl to marry, why would I need to infuriate you to death first?" Lin Qingyu asked strangely, "Can't I find one while you're alive?"

Gu Fuzhou was stunned for a moment. He then laughed from anger. "This conversation is just too beautiful, brother. Your statement is so grounded and reasonable that I can't refute at all."

Lin Qingyu said softly, "You're confident in my medical skills? We're just going to make you impotent for the time being. When attention is drawn away from you, I'll make it so that you can get it up again. When you were still Lu Wancheng, weren't you able to accept this quite well?"

"I was forced to back then. It was to save my life, how could I quibble about that? But it's different now." Gu Fuzhou said solemnly, "I must live with

dignity."

Lin Qingyu emphasized, "It's temporary."

"It won't do, even if it is temporary." Gu Fuzhou sneered, "Earlier you said, for the sake of General Gu's reputation, you wouldn't let him carry the title of 'male wife'. Now, you're just going to make him put on the impotent hat. Does your conscience not sting?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while. "What you said also makes sense." If they were to make Gu Fuzhou impotent and this matter was publicized by busybodies, Gu Fuzhou would lose face and it might even affect his prestige in the army. "If that's the case, then the only way is…"

Gu Fuzhou was half angry and couldn't help but answer, "For you to marry me?"

"For us to find a way to send both the Emperor and Xiao Cheng to the west together." Lin Qingyu said it so lightly, like he was talking about killing two chickens and making soup. "If the Emperor doesn't die, your bethrotal is inevitable. If the Emperor dies and Xiao Cheng ascends the throne, our situation will only be more difficult." Lin Qingyu's eyes darkened, and his

voice dropped, “Unless…they both die and some other prince takes over the throne. .”

Gu Fuzhou was quiet, not too surprised. Lin Qingyu dared to attack the crown prince. How different was that from outright killing him?

“Imperial Physician Lin’s setup is getting bigger and bigger.” Gu Fuzhou said with a smile, “Is it possible that you even want to make the Emperor a puppet, having him in your power and ordering the nobles about in his name?”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes slightly. “Why not?”

He had no interest in the country or state power. He just wanted to study medicine with peace of mind. But they just kept coming one after another, provoking him and Gu Fuzhou. It was tiresome and he was sick of it. It would be better to just thoroughly carry it through, to support a new emperor who was close to them and would never trouble them.

Gu Fuzhou thought for a while and said, “The Emperor’s princes have died in the battle for succession three years ago. Those who died have died and those you gave up have given up. Now, apart from Xiao Cheng, there’s only Xiao Jie and Xiao Li left. Xiao Li is a fool; even if he is the son by the formal wife, he

won't be able to inherit the throne. So that leaves us with Xiao Jie? A beautiful idiot."

Lin Qingyu grasped the key point. "You think he's beautiful?"

Gu Fuzhou's survival instinct suddenly kicked in and he corrected himself and joked, "It's so-so. You get used to it when you see it a lot. Unlike Imperial Physician Lin, who is not only a stunner at first glance but also grows more beautiful the more you look. It's completely different."

Lin Qingyu snorted coldly and said, "If Xiao Jie is an idiot, he'll be even easier for us to control."

Gu Fuzhou disagreed, "There's someone pretty smart next to Xiao Jie. I'm afraid it won't be us doing the controlling."

"Who?"

"You should have seen that person before. He used to be a little eunuch who served Xiao Jie. Later, he grew up to be a proper eunuch and left the palace with Xiao Jie to build his mansion. Now he is the steward of Xiao Jie's Mansion."

Lin Qingyu remembered that there was such a person. "Is this guy smart?"

"You can count him among the top three in the Dayu." Gu Fuzhou said, "And because of his physical deficiency, this person is paranoid, sinister and

ruthless. Dealing with him will take some brains."

The furrow in Lin Qingyu's brows loosened. "These are all things for later, which is when we'll talk about it. The most urgent thing is to think about how to kill those two people." Taking the Emperor's life wasn't difficult. He was severely ill to begin with. With a little change to his prescription, he could make the Emperor appear as though he were dying from aggravated illness. After all is said, the most troublesome one was Xiao Cheng.

Gu Fuzhou also thought of this. "Xiao Cheng doesn't drink medicine. He only eats things from the Eastern Palace. Having learned from his previous mistake,

using incense isn't an option either. If poisoning is impossible, the only possible opening is…"

Lin Qingyu took over, "Shen Huaishi."

Gu Fuzhou nodded. "But Qingyu, I can't wait very long. According to the Emperor's intentions, he wants to set down this marriage immediately."

"If our plan is successful, the matter of the marriage will be left unsettled; if it fails, it won't be too late to discuss our remarriage."

Gu Fuzhou concluded, "That is to say, whether we get remarried depends on when Xiao Cheng dies?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "That's right."

Gu Fuzhou said, a complicated expression on his face, "This mood has suddenly becomes quite subtle. I was originally hoping that Xiao Cheng would die immediately."

Lin Qingyu's voice turned slightly cold, "Don't you want him to now?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Then, I still do want him to."

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Chapter 57

Xiao Cheng's assassination was something Lin Qingyu needed to accomplish in his life. When Gu Fuzhou was still Lu Wancheng, they had also tried but it ended in failure. But things were different now. One of them was the head of the military generals, and the other was a close official of the Emperor. Things were unlike before, when he couldn't even enter the palace. He has also gotten to know the key person — Shen Huaishi. This time, he had a 50% chance of success.

If the plan was successful, Lin Qingyu would try to save the Emperor's life before Xiao Cheng dies and Gu Fuzhou would also pull Xiao Jie on board during this period. When Xiao Cheng dies, the Emperor will be deeply saddened and he would have no time to think about Gu Fuzhou's marriage. And even if he did, Lin Qingyu would let him go to heaven before he decreed the marriage. At that time, only Xiao Jie would be left to inherit the throne.

If the plan fails, Xiao Cheng and the emperor will live well but Gu Fuzhou will inevitably get married. Seeing how he was so opposed to marry someone else, it wasn't completely out of the question for him to block this marraige for Gu Fuzhou… And unless the emperor is tired of living, it was impossible for the emperor to dismiss him while he was still ill. Even if he gets married to Gu

Fuzhou again, it won't prevent him from continuing to study medicine in the Imperial Medical Office.

It wasn't the first time they got married anyway. As for who to would be taking on a wife and who would be taking on a husband, that was a matter to consider later.

The two had more or less agreed and it was already zishi. Gu Fuzhou sat cross-legged on the lower bunk and yawned. "Qingyu, it's so late. The General's Mansion must be closed by now. Can I stay overnight here in your place?"

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "If you were to go back, would the people of the General's Mansion dare not open the door for you?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Then I must just be finding excuses."

Lin Qingyu said, "You can stay but you'll have to sleep on the top bunk." In the past, when Lu Wancheng was in poor health, he always slept on the top bunk. Going up and down, up and down had been really annoying.

Gu Fuzhou immediately stood up and tidied up the bed put into disarray by his sitting. "Please." After saying so, he put his hands on the upper bunk and pulled himself up to sit easily.

One was on the top bunk and the other was on the bottom bunk. It was as if they were back in the past when they were still in the Nan'an Hou's Mansion. Back then, they would occasionally chat before going to bed. Sometimes Lu

Wancheng would talk about his hometown and teach him a bit of his hometown dialect; sometimes they would discussed how to do bad things together; sometimes Lu Wancheng would wake up because of the poison acting up, Lin Qingyu would then get out of bed and gently hug Lu Wancheng in his arms.

After Lu Wancheng's death, Lin Qingyu slept alone in the bottom bunk for a long time. He never slept well, his heart feeling empty. Tonight, there was finally someone above him, and his heart now seemed filled.

He had clearly just been conspiring to kill the emperor just a while ago, but he was surprisingly calm. Even if there were wolves around and the road ahead was unclear, you were likely to lose your life with the slightest carelessness, but as long as he had this person to accompany him all the way, he had nothing to be afraid of.

Gu Fuzhou turned over, making a lot of movement. Then, he stuck his head out from the upper bunk to look down at him. He asked, "Qingyu, are you asleep?"

Lin Qingyu had his eyes closed. "I'm asleep."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Okay. I just thought of one thing — have you and Shen Huaishi seen the secret code I left for you?"

In the original plot, Lin Qingyu had also been able to join the Imperial Hospital after Lu Wancheng's death using the prescription for the epidemic.

He had also met Shen Huaishi at the Imperial Medical Office. But the Lin Qingyu of the original plot didn't have the benefit of Lu Wancheng pointing things out for him and so he hadn't paid much attention to Shen Huaishi, meeting his end by suicide in the Eastern Palace.

"I see." It was because of this code that he and Shen Huaishi gradually became familiar with each other. "He said that this was a secret code only people from the Heavenly Prison Sect know."

Gu Fuzhou said: "Shen Huaishi cares only about two things in this life — Xiao Cheng and the Heavenly Prison Sect. The destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect is his biggest weakness, and it is also the key to opening Xiao Cheng's pursuit of his wife."

That's why he engraved the Heavenly Prison Sect's secret code on the medicine box he gave to Lin Qingyu. So long as Shen Huaishi saw this code and thought that Lin Qingyu was somehow related to the Heavenly Prison Sect, he wouldn't let Lin Qingyu die in the East Palace.

Lin Qingyu pondered and said, "So, the destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect was caused by Xiao Cheng?"

Gu Fuzhou put his hands behind his head, his tone carrying a rarely heard seriousness, "Tianji Camp and the Heavenly Prison Sect, one bright and one dark. They are both the Emperor's fangs and talons. However, in private, they never got along. The patriarch of the Heavenly Prison Sect was surnamed Shen and he was Shen Huaishi's father. The Heavenly Prison Sect has been

suppressed by the Tianji Camp for a long time and the head of the Shen Family felt very unwilling. Because of Shen Huaishi and Xiao Cheng's close relationship as childhood friends, the head of the Shen Family cast their lots with Xiao Cheng, secretly looking after him, even doing a lot of things for him. They were hoping that once Xiao Cheng ascends the throne, the Heavenly Prison Sect would then be the ones to hold power. At the time, Xiao Cheng was nothing more than just another prince."

The shadow guard organization and the prince were too close. This was a great taboo in the emperor's eyes. The head of the Shen Family thought that he'd been doing a job hiding it, but he still left clues. The Tianji Camp found evidence and presented it to the emperor. By that time, the battle for the succession was coming to an end, and Xiao Cheng was only one step away from being named crown prince.

The emperor recognized Xiao Cheng's ability. He knew that Xiao Cheng was the only actual candidate for crown prince, but he could not tolerate Heavenly Prison Sect's actions, secretly helping the prince to seize the position of heir. The emperor presented Xiao Cheng an edict establishing him as the crown prince and told him: As soon as the Heavenly Prison Gate is destroyed, my jade seal will be be stamped on this edict.

Lin Qingyu said: "So, Xiao Cheng was the culprit behind the destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect?"

"To be fair, the culprit should be the Emperor. At the last moment, Xiao Cheng's heart softened because of his childhood friendship with Shen Huaizhi.

Unfortunately, it was too late. The Tianji Camp, as per the Emperor's orders, arrived just in time to help Xiao Cheng what he didn't have the heart to. It was precisely because Xiao Cheng wavered that he almost lost his position as crown prince. Therefore, when Princess Jingchun was favored by the King of the Northern Realm, in order not to lose the Emperor's trust, he had no way to ask his love to stay. He regretted his soft-heartedness and blamed it all on Shen Huaishi." Gu Fuzhou sneered and said, "Shen Huaishi only lost the lives of his entire family, while Xiao Cheng lost his love!"

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but ask, "How on earth did you find out about these things? In your hometown, are these recorded down in historical documents?"

"It's hardly historical material." Gu Fuzhou said leisurely, "All of this—whether it's your fate or the love-hate entanglement between Xiao Cheng and Shen Huaishi, is all written in a novel called "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch" And I was fortunate enough to finish reading this extraordinary book."

"Huai's Refusal of the Monarch?" Lin Qingyu sneered, "No wonder Xiao Cheng and Shen Huaishi are the protagonists."

"Yeah, this book revolves around the two of them."

Hearing Gu Fuzhou say this much, Lin Qingyu had something he was puzzled about, "If you weren't gay in the past, why would you read this kind of book?"

"If we're going to talk about this, I'm going to lose all thoughts of sleep." Gu Fuzhou sat up, looking like he'd been deceived, "My older female cousin

recommended me this book, saying it was about a shadow guard's leveling up and counterattacking. I had a good feeling when I saw the title of the book. So, I flipped through a few pages and it opened the doors to a whole new world for me."

Lin Qingyu was puzzled, "You saw there was something not quite right when you were reading it. Why did you finish it?"

"It certainly wasn't quite right. But Shen Huaishi was really miserable. I wanted to scold him. I was so looking forward to the day he rises up." Gu Fuzhou complained, "Do you know that feeling? That feeling like you just can't stop? I was cursing him the entire time I was reading it. I couldn't stop and before I knew it, I had reached the end."

Lin Qingyu didn't quite understand the feeling of being unable to stop that Gu Fuzhou was talking about. If he had been the one to read this novel, he definitely wouldn't have read more than a page. "So, in "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch", what was their ending?"

"Shen Huaishi blackened after learning the truth – I explained the word 'blackened' to you, right?"

"En."

"He was going to avenge the Shen Family. But just as he was about to succeed, Shen Huaishi's heart grew soft. He abandoned his sword and fled, leaving the Eastern Palace. He then began wandering the world. When he left, Xiao Cheng

realized that he cared about him in his heart. Heedless of everything, he wanted to pursue him back. He even dissolved the harem for him and staged a scene of imprisonment. One day, Shen Huaishi found an opportunity to assassinate Xiao Cheng and Xiao Cheng, who was already the emperor by then, presented his chest openly and delivered that classic line — 'Kiss me and my life and country are yours'. Then — Shen Huaishi was moved! Can you believe that? He was moved! He accepted Xiao Cheng once more and became the first male empress of the Dayu. The two lived happily ever after."

Gu Fuzhou still remembered how he felt when he read that book.

After Lin Qingyu heard the whole story, he quickly arranged his thoughts. If they wanted to get rid of Xiao Cheng before the emperor's decree of marriage could be delivered, they would need to do two things. First, they had to let Shen Huaishi know the truth about the destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect as soon as possible. Second, Shen Huaishi must not be allowed to let his heart soften.

Chapter 58

To let Shen Huaishi know about the matter with Heavenly Prison Gate as soon as possible, the butcher in faraway Suicheng in Xuzhou was the key. This person's alias was Zhu Yongxin, and according to Gu Fuzhou, he was the double agent that the Heavenly Prison Gate had placed in Tianji Camp. Zhu Yongxin was extremely good at hiding his identity and even uptil the destruction of Heavenly Prison Gate, he had not revealed his identity.

In the Heavenly Prison Gate massacre, only Shen Huaishi and Zhu Yongxin survived. Zhu Yongxin once thought about telling Shen Huaishi the truth, but when he saw how readily Shen Huaishi joined the Tianji Camp, he was disheartened and didn't dare stay in Tianji Camp any longer. And so, he escaped by faking his death during a mission. He then went into hiding and became a seemingly ordinary butcher.

Zhu Yongxin knew the whole ins and outs of the matter. In "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch", it had been him who told Shen Huaishi everything the day before Xiao Cheng ascended the throne. What Lin Qingyu has to do was to get this day to happen in advance, the sooner the better.

After Shen Huaishi got the Heavenly Prison Gate's jade plaque, he too had wanted to rush to Xuzhou as soon as possible to find its owner. However, Xiao

Cheng refused to let him leave the capital and the matter was delayed again and again.

Lin Qingyu thought about letting Zhang Shiquan bring the butcher to the capital instead. However, Zhu Yongxin was cautious and refused to rush into the capital. Zhu Yongxin was a trained and skilled martial artist and Zhang Shiquan was but an administrative manager; how could Zhang Shiquan possibly make off with him.

Gu Fuzhou said: “Leave this to me, and I will get him to the capital.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “What are you going to do?”

“Naturally, I have my ways.” Gu Fuzhou smiled, “I’m not the chief general for nothing.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Oh, aren’t you?”

Gu Fuzhou woke up as though from a dream. “Ah, it seems I really am chief general for nothing.”

It was a long journey from the capital to Xuzhou. These days, Gu Fuzhou was often called into the palace by the Emperor and the Empress for various reasons. In addition to the seventh princess, he was also forced to meet with the granddaughter of the Prime Minister, the daughter of the Minister of War,

and the niece of the Crown Prince's Herald… In short, all the eligible ladies from every noble family.

The residual poison in Gu Fuzhou's body had already been cleared and he should already be rushing back to Yongliang to preside over the battle. Last time, Gu Fuzhou's defeat of Xixia, forced Xixia to retreat and recuperate, to feed the horses and sharpen their weapons. Although Zhao Mingwei was not as ever-victorious as Gu Fuzhou, he was also a general. With him stationed on the frontier, Xixia couldn't make any movements for the time being. At this time, the Emperor was in no hurry and he let him stay in the capital for a little longer, determined to settle this major turning point of lifelong import before his departure.

Since Gu Fuzhou was in the capital and in good health, he was of course, expected to attend court and discuss politics like the other military officers. His idle days were soon over and he returned to the nightmare of deep water and scorching fire. Lin Qingyu, busy in the Imperial Medical Office, was

forced to divert some of his attention to listen to him blame god and man, pouring out his grievances.

In the library, Lin Qingyu shuttled between the bookshelves, putting back the medical books he had read. Gu Fuzhou followed behind him, blindly following suit, “Qingyu, I really can’t stand it anymore.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t even look at him. “What’s the matter?”

“This morning, as soon as the rooster crowed, Yuan Yin forced me out of bed. What followed was morning court; I had to go to Qinzheng Hall to discuss matters and I was forced to listen to a bunch of nonsense. Finally! Finally, we got to lunch but instead of letting me go back to the mansion for an afternoon nap, the Empress invited me to listen to opera with the Imperial Academy’s Senior Official Sun’s great-granddaughter — even the donkey working in the mill isn’t tormented like this.” Pained, Gu Fuzhou covered his face with his hands. “Middle-aged people are already prone to hair loss to begin with. If things go on like this, I really will go bald.”

Although he knew it was useless, Lin Qingyu still gave a token urging, “When Heaven sends a great responsibility to the people, they must first suffer their minds and wills, labor their muscles and bones, and starve their bodies and skin. This is just the beginning.” This book, “The Imports of Surgery” should

be placed on the top shelf. Unable to reach it, he would need to find a stepladder.

Gu Fuzhou took the "The Imports of Surgery" from Lin Qingyu's hand, raised his hand and put the book in the correct position. "I understand the principle behind it but I just don't want to hear it."

After putting back the books, Lin Qingyu sat down at the table and opened a volume of old medical records and said, "Then you can report in sick."

"Wouldn't that be a crime? Deceiving the Emperor?"

"Does it matter? You've done a lot of those already."

Gu Fuzhou sat down beside Lin Qingyu, and said slowly, "Qingyu, I'm not telling you this because I want you to educate me on big truths. Nor do I want you to propose a solution."

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. "Then what do you want?"

Gu Fuzhou said honestly, "I want to be comforted and hugged."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"You definitely won't give me a hug so, please comfort me." Gu Fuzhou lay

down on the table, feeling hopeless, “I’m really tired.”

Lin Qingyu looked around. It was nearing curfew and they were the only ones in the library. Apart from him, no one else could see Gu Fuzhou’s salted fish side. General Gu’s honor would be preserved.

Lin Qingyu really didn’t feel much like hugging him. But comforting was still possible. Gu Fuzhou had let his hand lay haphazardly on the table and Lin Qingyu gently put his hand over it.

Gu Fuzhou, who was thirty years old outside but eighteen years old inside, opened his eyes slightly.

Lin Qingyu felt that Gu Fuzhou’s hand gradually stiffen and he couldn’t help the corners of his lips from raising up slightly. He said warmly, “Just be patient. When our plan is successful, we’ll have the new Emperor reward you with an idle position. You won’t need to go to morning court, you won’t need to discuss politics but your salary won’t be low. You can sleep as long as you want every day. When you’re awake, you’ll eat, drink and enjoy looking at the

flowers; you'll play touhu and watch plays. And when you get tired, you'll sleep. — Alright?"

Gu Fuzhou, who had been so eloquent just now, only had one word, "Alright."

Lin Qingyu let go and stroked Gu Fuzhou's hair instead. "You won't go bald, don't worry." Before Gu Fuzhou could say anything, Lin Qingyu added, "And even if you do, I will find a way to make it grow back."

Gu Fuzhou didn't know where to put his hands. Because he didn't want to appear flustered in front of Lin Qingyu, he tried his best to keep it funny, and joked, "If you can do that, if you somehow find a way to my hometown one day, you'll be rich overnight."

Faced with the Emperor's urgings of marriage, Gu Fuzhou could only perfunctorily shirk and evade. He said that he liked the gentleness of women from the South more than the luxurious women of the capital. When the Empress came out with a few chosen women from the South for him, he then claimed he liked the candidness of the women from the Northwest the best.

Gu Fuzhou dragged on and on until Zhu Yongxin arrived at the capital. It was the soldiers of the general's mansion who brought Zhu Yongxin into the capital. These soldiers were all extraordinarily skilled and they were loyal to Gu Fuzhou. These were people he could trust.

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou met this butcher who could reverse Shen Huaishi's life in Lin Qingyu's residence. Zhu Yongxin was in his thirties. His appearance

was unremarkable and his sense of presence was extremely low. Ordinary people would immediately forget such a face.

Zhu Yongxin was a person who had gone through life and death. Even if he had been forcibly brought to the capital, he was neither arrogant nor humble when facing them. He even laughed out loud. “I never expected that I, a humble pig-killer, would have a beauty and a general see me off to my death. Not bad, not bad!”

“Death?” Gu Fuzhou sat on the large sandalwood chair, his expression indifferent, showing the temperament of one who has always enjoyed ruling over in a high position, “Why do you think you will die?”

Zhu Yongxin said indifferently, “The general forced me back to the capital from a thousand miles away. If it isn’t for the Tainji Camp, what else could it be?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Given how you’re acting, it seems that you are ready to die. Since that is the case, you should have just sacrificed your life for your master when Heavenly Prison Sect was destroyed. What are you running for?”

Zhu Yongxin’s expression changed. “How do you know that I am from the Heavenly Prison Sect!”

Lin Qingyu sneered. “Since you hadn’t chosen to die, you could have continued to stay in the Tianji Camp and wait for an opportunity to take

revenge. They say that everyone in the Heavenly Prison Gate was willing to lay down their lives. It seems that wasn't the case."

Zhu Yongxin laughed loudly. "Even the young master of the Heavenly Prison Sect has joined the Tianji Camp. What can I do alone!"

Gu Fuzhou said, "Shen Huaishi didn't defect to the enemy. He simply believed the Crown Prince's words, thinking that the Heavenly Prison Sect was destroyed by enemies from the Jianghu banding together. He also thought that the Crown Prince had saved him."

Zhu Yongxin was taken aback. "Is this true?"

"I can arrange a meeting between you and Shen Huaishi." Lin Qingyu said, "He is now in the Tianji Camp and is a shadow guard closely serving the Crown Prince. He can do a lot more things that you can."

Zhu Yongxin had wanted to tell Shen Huaishi the truth three years ago and he said without hesitation, "Alright, I would like to see the Young Master again and tell him the truth. I'll recount everything systematically and in detail!"

"Systematically and in detail?" Lin Qingyu sneered, "What's the use of telling him the truth? You'll tell him that the culprit was the Emperor and that the Crown Prince relented and backed out of doing something to Heavenly Prison Sect at the last minute? You know very well the personality of your young master. Given his affection for the Crown Prince, what would this trifling recounting manage to do? I'm afraid that hearing your so-called truth, he

would struggle and suffers for a while but ultimately chooseto let go and forgive. He'll continue to serve Tianji Camp and the Crown Prince. "

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu's bright face and sinister smile. A fire was suddenly sent burning in his heart.

"You have to tell Shen Huaishi that all this had nothing to do with the Emperor. It was Xiao Cheng who took the initiative to sacrifice the lives of all the people in the Heavenly Prison Sect to show his loyalty to the Emperor and secure his as Crown Prince." Lin Qingyu leaned down and whispered in Zhu Yongxin's ear, "That's the real truth. Do you understand?"

Lin Qingyu's eyes were like bottomless cold pools that could almost drown a person. Zhu Yongxin's pupils gradually became slack and he said meekly, "Understood."

"Very good." Lin Qingyu straightened up and instructed Huan Tong to see Zhu Yongxin out.

Gu Fuzhou looked at him with a smile, "When did Imperial Physician Lin learn to tamper with the plot?"

"It was worth learning," Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Isn't it simple enough that anyone can do it?"

Gu Fuzhou had also wondered when he read "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch". In the early parts, Xiao Cheng obviously valued the position of Crown Prince

the most. Why did he suddenly turned soft-hearted when it came to the matter of the Heavenly Prison Sect when he hadn't even fallen in love with Shen Huaishi yet? Later, he realized that since the author wanted to write a happy ending for them, she naturally couldn't write it out to be so final and uncompromising. She had to make it convenient for Xiao Cheng to be whitewashed in the future — Was it intense and deep-seated hatred? It didn't go that far. Didn't Xiao Cheng regret it at the end? Wasn't it the Emperor who had the Tianji Camp carry it out? Therefore, there should be no problem for them getting together.

But Lin Qingyu clearly understood these routines. He completely blocked this whitewashing point and killed any excuse for Shen Huaishi to grow soft-hearted.

Lin Qingyu said, "I'm going to take a bath."

"A bath during the day?" Gu Fuzhou remembered the scene just now, "You were so close to Zhu Yongxin just now. Did you do something to him?"

"I planted Gu on him to prevent him from talking nonsense and disrupting our plans." Lin Qingyu's voice was cold, "If Shen Huaishi still won't lay a hand on Xiao Cheng after hearing this, then he isn't even worthy of being human."

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Chapter 59

Since Lin Qingyu was promoted to the fifth-rank imperial physician, he and Chu Zhengde would go to the Emperor every day to diagnose his pulse. Though he was able to go in and out of the Emperor's sleeping chambers, so long as he got even a little bit close to the Eastern Palace, the guards on duty would be on high alert. But as long as he and Shen Huaishi were within the palace compound, there would be chances for them to meet.

Chu Zhengde was getting old and it is inevitable that his body would not be able to keep up with everything that he wanted to do. For the past few days, he had been suffering from a cold and had taken leave to recuperate at home. Lin Qingyu was the only imperial physician serving the emperor for the time being.

That night, the Emperor's headache returned. Lin Qingyu happened to be on duty and was invited to the Emperor's palace.

Tonight, the one serving the emperor in bed was the same young man Lin Qingyu had seen last time. Though said to be 'serving in bed', with the emperor's sick body, he couldn't actually do anything and he simply let the young man warm his bed and pour him tea.

Lin Qingyu applied acupuncture for the emperor and the emperor's headache eased. When he opened his eyes, he saw Lin Qingyu and his male pet standing

beside the dragon bed, side by side. The male pet blushed and whispered, “Your Majesty”. Lin Qingyu, however, as calm and composed as ever said, “Autumn is fast approaching. With its coming, the yang energy will gradually shrink and the yin energy will gradually grow. The Emperor’s prescription must also be changed to match the way of yin and yang. This official will return to the Imperial Hospital to prepare a new prescription for Your Majesty.”

The emperor looked at him. Himself not knowing what muscle he’d pulled wrong, he said, “I have pen and paper here. Wou can write it here and show me when you are done.”

Lin Qingyu paused and said, “Yes.”

The emperor sat up with the help of his male pet. He looked at the beauty in official uniform writing under the lamp; long eyelashes thick like butterfly wings. Even though his temperament was cold, it was difficult to overlook the flirtatious look seen between his brows and the corners of his eyes. In particular, the tear-shaped mole under his eyes made the emperor’s heart itch.

But itch was all it did. He was old and had been sick for so long. He had not added a new person to his harem for a long time. When he gets better, maybe he can invite more beauties. It was a pity that he didn’t have enough energy

now. So after Lin Qingyu finished drawing up the recipe, he allowed him to withdraw.

Lin Qingyu followed Xue Ying out of the sleeping chamblers. Looking back at the bright yellow dragon curtains, his eyes grew dark and cold.

It seemed that even without the emperor forcing a marriage upon Gu Fuzhou, sooner or later, there would have also been reason for Lin Qingyu to set his hands upon His Majesty.

Xiao Cheng heard that the emperor was ill and to show his filial piety, he came late at night and happened to run into Lin Qingyu who had been exiting the sleeping chambers. Lin Qingyu glanced at him, and his eyes fell on Shen Huaishi behind him.

Shen Huaishi also looked back at him and then Xiao Cheng said coldly, “Have you looked enough?”

Shen Huaishi quickly retracted his gaze. “This subordinates dares not.”

Xiao Cheng smiled. “Why wouldn’t you dare? Xiao Qingyu was born with a face that drives men crazy. You should look more if given the chance. You

might not have the chance to see it again in the future." Saying so, he gave a 'hmph' and follow Xue Ying into the sleeping chamber.

Another eunuch came with a lantern. "Imperial Physician Lin, I will take you back to the Imperial Hospital."

Shen Huaishi could only stand watch outside. When Lin Qingyu brushed past him, he whispered, "Find time to come to my house to find me."

Shen Huaishi was startled, and subconsciously glanced in the direction of the sleeping chamber. He then gave a low "en".

Shen Huaishi didn't make Lin Qingyu wait for long. And three days later, late into the night, he appeared in Lin Qingyu's residence like a ghost. Lin Qingyu

was dispensing medicine at his table and as soon as he looked up, he saw Shen Huaishi standing behind the window. “Imperial Physician Lin.”

Lin Qingyu opened the window. “Come in.”

Shen Huaishi was a little nervous. “I can’t stay for long. If His Highness finds out that I still have contact with you… Imperial Physician Lin, what have you sought me out for?”

Lin Qingyu said, “I have found the person you are looking for.”

Shen Huaishi was stunned and said excitedly, “You mean, the owner of that jade tablet?”

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. “Come out.”

With a clack, the door to the room adjacent to the study slowly opened and Zhu Yongxin walked out. “Young Master.”

Shen Huaishi’s eyes widened and he said in disbelief, “Zhu Dage?!”

Zhu Yongxin was a double agent. Not many people in the Heavenly Prison Sect knew about it; Shen Huaishi was one of them. After Shen Huaishi entered

the Tianji Camp, he also looked for Zhu Yongxin. He did not expect to be met with news of his death.

“Zhu Dage, you’re not…” Once again seeing a man you once thought dead, even a stern powerful man’s eyes would redden. “It’s really you. You’re not dead?”

In contrast, Zhu Yongxin seemed a lot more unperturbed. There was a deep look in his eyes. He said, “I am indeed not dead. How can I die before I avenge this enormous debt of blood!”

“Avenge?” Shen Huaishi was at a loss, “The Red Fang Sect, which destroyed the Heavenly Prison Sect, was wiped out by the Tianji Camp three years ago. It was by the order of His Royal Highness the Crown Prince himself.”

“The Crown Prince? Ha– Zhu Yongxin said with a grin, “How could a wicked sect in the Chiya Sect area destroy the emperor’s eagle and dog overnight! Young Master, have you never had your doubts?”

“It was a traitor to the Heavenly Prison Sect, one who had defected to the Red Fang Sect. That was how the Heavenly Prison Sect…”

Zhu Yongxin interrupted him, “The Red Fang Sect had long been secretly recruited by the Imperial court. That bloody massacre had also been deliberately set up by the Imperial court. It was not that there were traitors in the Heavenly Prison Sect but that the Imperial court had betrayed the

Heavenly Prison Sect. Under the masks of those so-called Red Fang Sect members were the faces of the members of Tainji Camp!"

Shen Huaishi's face lost all color. "The Imperial court…? Heavenly Prison Sect has always been loyal to the Imperial court, why would the Imperial court…"

Lin Qingyu said, "Was the Heavenly Prison Sect loyal to the Imperial court, or were they loyal to the Crown Prince? If it was the latter, do you think the Emperor would have stood for it?"

There was only one last hope in Shen Huaishi's eyes and he murmured, "Then it was the Emperor. Was it the Emperor who wanted to kill us?"

"Yes, the Emperor wanted to move against us. But his good son knew very well his Imperial father's will. Before the Emperor could, the Crown Prince dealt

with us first to gain the Emperor's favor heart, and win the crown prince that he has longed for!"

Pain coursed through Shen Huaishi's body and he could barely stand. A light medicinal fragrance hit and he felt his arm being supported. When he raised his eyes, Lin Qingyu's face appeared in his field of vision.

"Impossible." Shen Huaishi grasped Lin Qingyu's arm, "His Royal Highness wouldn't do this, Imperial Physician Lin…"

"Are you surprised?" Lin Qingyu said in a low voice, "Is this not something Xiao Cheng could do?"

Shen Huaishi shook his head: "Evidence, I want evidence."

Zhu Yongxin took out a half-broken mask from a sackcloth pouch and threw it on the table. "This is what I found on an assassin from the Tianji Camp after the destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect."

The mask has green faced and long toothed. It was a mask exclusively used by the Red Fang Sect. It was stained with old dried blood. Shen Huaishi's eyes felt like they'd been stabbed, it was as though blood would flow from them.

"Huaishi, look at me."

Shen Huaishi was momentarily stunned. He hasn't heard anyone call him that for far too long and he thought of his father and brother. They used to call him

that.

Lin Qingyu's eyes had a captivating power. "You also had a lot of doubts about what had happened back then, didn't you? How did the powerful Heavenly Prison Sect get destroyed by some sect from the Jianghu? How was Xiao Cheng able to appear immediately after the incident and manage to save you? After the Heavenly Prison Sect was destroyed, did Xiao Cheng treat you so very well, so very well that infatuation and affection was born in your heart, until the King of the North asked to marry Princess Jingchun?"

"You, do you still not understand?"

There was a dead silence in the study. A gust of wind blew through, making the windows creak. Shen Huaishi startled as though waking from a big dream. He suddenly pushed Lin Qingyu away and turned to leave.

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Where are you going? Are you going to confront Xiao Cheng? Who do you think you are? A shadow guard whose entire sect he killed but is still willing to lay down his life for him, even willing take off his clothes for him to vent his desires on. Why would he tell you the truth? He lied to you once. Why can he not lie to you a second time? What is it that you expect to hear from him?"

Shen Huaishi froze in place, both his hands clenched into fists, shaking.

"If I were you, I wouldn't give him a chance to argue." Lin Qingyu slowed down, "You said that I always look down on you. It's because I hate people who

hold themselves cheap."

Shen Huaishi flew out of the window and disappeared in the blink of an eye.

Lin Qingyu had done everything he needed to do. All they could do now was wait.

No matter how Xiao Cheng looked down on Shen Huaishi, he trusted him very much. There was lots of ways for Shen Huaishi to assassinate Xiao Cheng and get away unscathed. How could strike Xiao Cheng while he was sleeping and slash directly at his neck; or while Xiao Cheng is reading reports, he could come from behind, cover his mouth and strangle his neck. Lin Qingyu could help as well. If Shen Huashi were to seek out his help, he could get a poison to

put in Xiao Cheng's tea – Lin Qingyu would choose the most suitable poison for Xiao Cheng.

Just imagining these scenes made Lin Qingyu feel extremely happy.

Shen Huaishi… don't let me down.

Another night on shift, when Hu Ji came back from a doctor's visit, he saw Lin Qingyu playing with a urn. He leaned over curiously and looked at it, asking, "Imperial Physician Lin, what is this?"

"Golden Silkworm Gu."

Hu Ji saw the golden multi-legged bugs in the urn and quickly backed away. "Why are you raising such things?"

Lin Qingyu put the lid on the urn and said, downplaying the matter, "Its wings can be used as medicine."

Hu Ji forced out a laugh. "I see."

"Did you just come from Sili Jian?" Lin Qingyu asked, "Did you get any news?"

"News?" Hu Ji thought for a while, "Oh, I heard from the eunuch who delivers flowers to the Eastern Palace that His Highness the Crown Prince has been

moody and short-tempered these past two days. It seems the shadow guard who often follows him around has suddenly disappeared."

As expected. Someone as stubborn as Shen Hauishi would need time to fully accept this matter. No one knows though what conclusions he has come to after these past two days of thinking.

In "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch", Shen Huaishi will put a knife to Xiao Cheng's neck after knowing the truth. Now that the "truth" he has learned was even more cruel, shouldn't his actions be even more pleasing to the eye?

That night, the palace was surprisingly calm. During the second half of the night, the imperial physicians on duty in the Imperial Hospital all dozed off.

Under the moonlight, a palace maid stumbled into the Imperial Hospital, breaking the tranquility. She was almost crying as she said, "Imperial Physician! Imperial Physician to the Eastern Palace!"

Everyone was startled awak and they all stood up one after another. Lin Qingyu though remained sitting, his eyebrows slightly raised.

——Why were they still calling for an Imperial Physician? Could it be that Xiao Cheng could still be saved?

Everyone knew that His Highness the Crown Prince has always been in good health. So urgently calling for a doctor in the middle of the night, he must be

suffering from a sudden illness. The palace maid was so flustered, presumably, his condition must be serious.

Hu Ji was the chief physician for the Eastern Palace and he did not dare to slack off at this moment. Medicine box on his back and turned to leave. Lin Qingyu stopped him. “Imperial Physician Hu.”

Hu Ji said anxiously, “Is there something the matter, Imperial Physician Lin?”

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment and said, “It’s fine. You should go.”

In addition to Hu Ji, many of the imperial physicians went with him as well. Lin Qingyu was the imperial physician personally assigned to the emperor and he had to remain in the Imperial Hospital on standby in case the Emperor needed him.

Hu Ji and the others were out all night and even though it was already dawn, none of them had come back. The Eastern Palace remained brightly lit through out the night. People could only be seen entering, but no one was coming out.

The Eastern Palace seemed to be blocked and Lin Qingyu could not wait for any news.

At Chen Shi, Lin Qingyu ended his shift with a heavy feeling. As soon as he went through the palace gate, he heard someone calling him, “Imperial Physician Lin.”

Gu Fuzhou was wearing his official military uniform. His appearance at the gate of the palace at this hour, he must be heading to court.

Lin Qingyu walked quickly to him. “General.”

Gu Fuzhou appeared careless and sloppy. He didn’t seem to be fully awake. “You must be hungry after spending all night on duty. I’ve prepared some food for you. Once we’re in the carriage, you should eat it while its hot.”

Lin Qingyu took the food box handed over by Gu Fuzhou. “Thank you, general, for your consideration.”

Seeing that Lin Qingyu’s expression wasn’t good, Gu Fuzhou’s remaining sleepiness disappeared at once. He lowered his voice and asked, “What’s wrong? Did Shen Huaishi make a move already?”

“He did but he must still have had reservations. Otherwise, with his skills, how could Xiao Cheng not have been killed with one hit?” Lin Qingyu closed his

eyes and endured, holding the food box Gu Fuzhou gave him tightly in his arms , “If Xiao Cheng is lucky enough to make it out alive…”

Gu Fuzhou pondered for a moment. Then his brows smoothed out and he smiled. “Let’s not talk about whether Xiao Cheng made it out alive or not. We don’t know that yet. Even if he is lucky enough to survive, then we’ll just have to work hard. I’ll help you think of a better way.” Gu Fuzhou Raising his hand, using his broad palm to cover the back of Lin Qingyu’s head, “Don’t worry, it’s no big deal. Go back quickly and head to bed. Remember to eat something first. I’ll go to you after morning court.”

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Chapter 60

Lin Qingyu had no appetite, but still listened to Gu Fuzhou and opened the food box on the carriage. On the top layer was freshly baked biscuits; golden, crispy, and steaming. Lin Qingyu picked up a biscuit and ate them in small bites as he reorganized in his mind the things that had happened last night.

If he hadn't known the ins and outs of the whole thing in advance, he would definitely have thought that Xiao Cheng really was suffering from a sudden illness. Despite such a big event, the palace guards hadn't made any moves. The Crown Prince was attacked by an assassin. Shouldn't they be searching the entire palace? Why had they simply blocked any news from coming out of the Eastern Palace?

How did Shen Huaishi succeed in attacking Xiao Cheng? Did he escape successfully? And where was he now?

Lin Qingyu knew that over-thinking was useless. For now, the only plan was to wait and watch for changes.

That afternoon, Gu Fuzhou rushed to his house. This time, he didn't climb over the wall and instead, walked straight through the main entrance. When

Huan Tong saw the god of war he so admired, his eyes shone and his hands trembled as he served tea.

Gu Fuzhou assumed a reserved and unsmiling expression, asking Huan Tong with a straight face if he wanted his autograph.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but admire how Gu Fuzhou was still in the mood to tease at a time like this. He sent the confused Huan Tong away and asked, "How is the situation in the palace?"

Gu Fuzhou took a sip of tea and said, "At morning court, Xiao Cheng was absent due to illness and the Prime Minister presided over the meeting. On the surface, everything else seemed the same as usual, but the atmosphere in the palace was obviously not right. It felt as though a rising wind forebodes a coming storm."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Illness? Exactly how ill? Is Xiao Cheng still clear-headed?"

Gu Fuzhou said, "I don't know."

The many imperial physicians who had gone last night had not returned, indicating that Xiao Cheng was seriously injured and that his life was hanging by a thread. Who ordered the blockade of news and arranged his substitution at morning court – the emperor?

Gu Fuzhou went on and said, "I asked the guards on duty in the palace and they also haven't received any news last night. They also hadn't heard about

any assassin. To sum up, whether it was Xiao Cheng or the Emperor, neither of them probably wants the whole city to learn of this incident."

Lin Qingyu nodded in agreement. Although the emperor's condition has improved, he was still only able to read reports in his sleeping chambers. Discuss issues, making decisions on major matters and other such things were still left to Xiao Cheng.

With the emperor's current state, if something were to happen to the crown prince responsible for supervising the country, the ministers would be left without a leader, the government will be destabilized and the country will be thrown into turmoil. If he were Emperor, he too would choose to suppress news of this incident and then send secret agents to investigate secretly.

The more Lin Qingyu thought about it, the more irritable he felt. He rubbed his temples and said, "If Xiao Cheng had just been killed on the spot, this

situation wouldn't be so troublesome. Couldn't Shen Huaishi have been a bit more decisive, even just this once?

"It might not be that he'd gone soft-hearted. There may have been other circumstances at the time." Gu Fuzhou smiled, "Qingyu, do you know how to deduce using scenario reproduction?"

Lin Qingyu had never heard of it but he could more or less guess what Gu Fuzhou wanted to express. "How do you want to do it?"

Gu Fuzhou pulled Lin Qingyu to stand up, eager to try it. "Think of yourself as Xiao Cheng and think of me as Shen Huaishi. Let's re-enact what may have happened at that time, maybe it can help you clear your mind."

Lin Qingyu sat back down. "Boring."

"Then I'll play Xiao Cheng and you play Shen Huaishi?" Without waiting for Lin Qingyu to utter another "boring", Gu Fuzhou sat down on the bunk, glanced at Lin Qingyu and did a remarkably accurate impression of Xiao Cheng. "Still struck dumb? What? I haven't seen you for a few days and now you've forgotten how to serve me in bed?"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Gu Fuzhou's original intention was to make Lin Qingyu relax but there was no helping it if he wouldn't go along. Just as he was thinking of other ways to coax

the other, he heard Lin Qingyu say, “Shen Huaishi has been missing for two days. Shouldn’t Xiao Cheng ask him where he’d gone first?”

Gu Fuzhou curled his lips into a smile and changed his words, “Where have you been these past two days?”

Lin Qingyu walked slowly to the bed, thinking about what Shen Huaishi could have possibly said and done. Since Shen Huaishi failed to kill Xiao Cheng with a single strike, it was very likely that he had still given Xiao Cheng a chance to quibble. “I…I have something to ask you, I hope you can tell me the answer.”

Gu Fuzhou narrowed his eyes. “First, tell Gu where you have gone.”

Lin Qingyu pursed his lips and said nothing, a storm brewing in his eyes. Suddenly, something clamped around his waist. Gu Fuzhou had grabbed him around the waist and pulled him to the bed. Lin Qingyu wanted to struggle, but felt that this was indeed a move that Xiao Cheng would pull, so he let Gu Fuzhou press him down.

Gu Fuzhou supported his body with one hand and pinched Lin Qingyu’s face with the other. He said coldly, “I haven’t seen you for two days. You’ve got

some temper. I asked you a question. Are you deaf or stupid? Did you not hear…!"

Gu Fuzhou didn't put his weight on Lin Qingyu but simply pressed him down with his hand, without much of any force behind it. Lin Qingyu could easily break free, just like Shen Huaishi could easily break free from Xiao Cheng.

But would Shen Huaishi have broken free? Obedience to Xiao Cheng's orders was an instinct engraved in his bones and his body has long been conditioned to satisfy a man's desires in bed. It might take some time before Shen Huaishi is able to break through the shackles and resist his instincts.

Lin Qingyu didn't struggle, shrinking back deeper into the bed.

He didn't know if Shen Huaishi would shrink but he himself wanted to create a bit more distance between himself and Gu Fuzhou. Although they had hugged before, it was the first time for them to be in bed like this, in this one-above-the-other position.

Looking at Gu Fuzhou from this angle, he could see Gu Fuzhou's Adam's apple and sharp chin. His own figure was too different from Gu Fuzhou's. His whole

person was shrouded in the breath of another man. The feeling of domination and control made him inexplicably flustered.

“Still not talking? Very well.” Gu Fuzhou’s breathing gradually became messy, “It doesn’t matter. Gu has a way to get you to speak.”

After speaking, Gu Fuzhou stopped moving.

Lin Qingyu forced himself to remain composed and asked, “What is your way?”

Gu Fuzhou looked down at the teardrop mole at the corner of Lin Qingyu’s eye. He calmed himself and said with a smile, “Five hundred words are omitted here. He probably pulled some evil tricks of you, taking advantage of you, messing with you until your clothes are in disarray, your hair scattered haphazardly…”

Out of respect, he wouldn’t mess with Lin Qingyu’s clothes but it shouldn’t be too out of line to play with his hair.

Gu Fuzhou’s hand touch Lin Qingyu’s hair and he took off the hair clasp that he was wearing. His black hair was scattered like satin and hung down on Lin Qingyu’s shoulders, adding a touch of glamour to him.

Gu Fuzhou put the hair clasp on the pillow and said, “At this time, Shen Huaishi must have been thinking about the Heavenly Prison Sect but his body

was insulted by Xiao Cheng. The servility he had cultivated for many years was finally broken – he had awakened and he wanted to resist!"

This emotional change was reasonable. Lin Qingyu tried to push Gu Fuzhou away but was held down even more forcefully by Gu Fuzhou.

"What are you resisting for? — After doing it so many times, are you still afraid?" Gu Fuzhou said in a deep voice, "There's nothing to be afraid of. I'm not big at all, there's no need for you to bear anything." After speaking, he

couldn't hold back and even laughed out loud. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I broke character."

Lin Qingyu put his hands on Gu Fuzhou's chest, raised his eyebrows and said, "Would Xiao Cheng say that about himself? But say the opposite and that should be about right."

"Don't worry about these details." Gu Fuzhou whispered, "Let's continue."

Lin Qingyu's eyes darkened. He turned over and sat on Gu Fuzhou's back. He picked up the hair clasp by the pillow and pressed it against his throat. "Three years ago, how was the Heavenly Prison Sect destroyed?"

Gu Fuzhou put away his smile and said in shock, "Did someone say something to you? Shen Huaishi, if you dare lay a hand on me, I won't spare you!"

"I'm just asking you. Was it the Red Fang Sect or the Tianji Camp that fought the Heavenly Prison Sect that night!

Gu Fuzhou gritted his teeth and said, "Where did you hear this from!"

"Tell me. I just want the truth."

"The truth?" Gu Fuzhou sneered, "The truth is that you should have gone down to the Yellow Springs along with the rest of the Heavenly Prison Sect. It

was I who saved you. I did everything to let you live. What else do you want!"

Lin Qingyu imagined himself as Shen Huaishi and gradually lost himself in his role. "So, it's all true. It was the Tianji Camp. It was you…!"

Gu Fuzhou grabbed Lin Qingyu's wrist and said sternly, "An assassin organization in the imperial court, having lost the trust of the Emperor, will surely die. No one could have saved them, not even I. That I could save you is already…"

"Shut up." Lin Qingyu exerted strength in his hand, and the hair clasp almost pierced Gu Fuzhou's throat, "I will never trust you again. Go to hell…!"

At the climax of the play, Huan Tong's voice, so out of tune with the situation, suddenly came from outside the door. "Young Master, it's time to eat. Will General Gu be staying for the meal as well?"

The two looked at each other. Gu Fuzhou said, "Could it be that Shen Huaishi had also been interrupted?"

"It's possible." Lin Qingyu got off Gu Fuzhou, "Shen Huaishi panicked and made a slip. He didn't have time to completely frag him."

"Why do you sound more and more like you came from my hometown?" Gu Fuzhou was too lazy to move, and maintained his previous posture, "But these are just speculations. I'm afraid that only Shen Huaishi and Xiao Cheng

actually know what happened that night. We'll just have to wait. There'll be news."

Lin Qingyu pondered, "People in the Eastern Palace are the most tight-lipped. If we want news, the only possibly sources are Hu Ji or Xiao Songzi."

Gu Fuzhou asked, "Who's Xiao Songzi?"

"A eunuch in Qinzheng Palace. A lot of the information I know, I got from him."

Gu Fuzhou joked, "With such a loose mouth, no wonder he's called Xiao Songzi."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Huan Tong, who still hadn't gotten a response outside, asked again, "Young Master, are you in there?"

Lin Qingyu asked Gu Fuzhou, "Are you going to stay for dinner?"

"Yes." Gu Fuzhou said lazily, "I can finish off three bowls of rice in one meal now, so ask Huan Tong to prepare more meat."

Lin Qingyu still had his long hair loose. He instructed Huan Tong, keeping the door closed between them. There was no mirror in the study, so he tried several times but failed to tie his long hair. He couldn't help complaining, "We

might have been reproducing the scene, but did you have to mess with my hair?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Sorry, I couldn't hold back. Here, let me help."

Lin Qingyu sat at the table and let Gu Fuzhou fiddle with his hair. He suddenly thought of something and said, "By the way, let me feel your abdominal muscles."

Gu Fuzhou was a little surprised, but also a little gratified. "Imperial Physician Lin actually asked to touch my abs. Come, come. No need to be polite, feel free."

Lin Qingyu touched it a couple of time and said, "It wasn't just my imagination just now."

"What do you mean?"

Lin Qingyu jokingly said, "Your abdominal muscles really aren't that tight anymore."

Gu Fuzhou was immediately on high alert and he touched it himself. "No way! I lift weights every day."

"I heard that when General Gu used to stay in the capital, he would train for eight hours a day. It was only then that he managed to develop such a figure.

How long do you lift weights now?

Gu Fuzhou said, depressed, “About an hour.”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “Looks like you need to take care then, General Gu.”

62

Chapter 61

Lin Qingyu stayed at home for the entire day. There was still no news from the palace. He had even asked Huan Tong to go to Hu Ji's house to inquire but Hu Ji had yet to return home. Most probably, he was still in the Eastern Palace.

On the evening of the second day since the incident in the Eastern Palace, Lin Qingyu returned to his shift at the Imperial Hospital. Some of the Imperial Physicians who had gone to the Eastern Palace that day had already returned. Every one of them was in a hurry and they were very tight-lipped about the crown prince's situation. Lin Qingyu asked several times but they all only answered that the crown prince had come down with a sudden illness and needed to rest for a while.

They must be taking him for an idiot. Although Lin Qingyu couldn't see their prescriptions, based from what was missing from the medicine cabinets, he knew that Xiao Cheng had suffered serious trauma and was bleeding profusely, most likely he had taken damage to the chest and lungs.

On the third day after the incident, Hu Ji finally returned to the Imperial Hospital. He was wearing the same uniform, now washed for three days. The

sleeves were stained with blood and he was exhausted to the point of falling into a trance.

Lin Qingyu offered to send him back home. In the carriage, Hu Ji told Lin Qingyu that His Highness was not ill, but was injured by a sword.

"That day, when I arrived at the Eastern Palace, the Crown Prince had already been carried to the bed. He was wearing only his sleeping robe, with a bloody hole in his chest. His whole body was body was drenched in blood but his eyes were wide open and his mind was still clear though he uttered not a word." Recalling the scene at that time, Hu Ji felt his heart fill with lingering fears. "I rushed forward to try to stop the bleeding, but he suddenly grabbed my clothes and I heard him say 'come back'… he then passed out and even until I left, he has yet to wake."

Lin Qingyu couldn't care less what Xiao Cheng said before he fell into a coma. He just wanted to know when Xiao Cheng would die. "How certain are you of waking the Crown Prince?"

Hu Ji shook his head with a wry smile. "Less than thirty percent."

Thirty percent…still too much.

Hu Ji added, "However, the Crown Prince's left lung has been injured. Even if he is able to escape with his life this time, I am afraid that in the future,

medicine shall never be parted from his mouth. He will live on as a medicine pot."

Lin Qingyu still felt unreconciled. What was a mere left lung? If Shen Huaizhi's sword had moved just a tiny bit more, it would have penetrated Xiao Cheng's heart. This was what he wanted to hear.

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment and said, "Hu Ji, would you always do you best to treat a patient no matter who the patient is?"

Hu Ji said without hesitation, "Of course, this is my way of medicine."

Lin Qingyu didn't say any more. Hu Ji studied medicine in order to save the dying and the wounded. Even if the patient were a heinous person, he would probably save the person first before turning him over to the authorities. On the other hand, he studied medicine, poisons, and gu simply because he liked it. He would even use these to harm people. He respected Hu Ji's ideas and did not want to ruin Hu Ji's way of medicine.

Besides, the crux of the matter was that even if Hu Ji had the heart to do something, the other Imperial Physicians weren't blind. Every bowl of medicine in the Eastern Palace would be tested for poison. Murdering the

Crown Prince was a capital offense. Even if it were for the sake of his family, he couldn't do it rashly.

Could it be that this could only be left to fate?

Hu Ji was so tired that he couldn't keep his eyes open. And yet, he did not forget to warn Lin Qingyu, "By the way, the Emperor has issued a death order. News of the attempted assassination on the Crown Prince must not be leaked. Imperial Physician Lin must not tell this matter to others. "

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "Don't worry, I won't breathe a single word."

Having said that, Lin Qingyu immediately told Gu Fuzhou the news.

For the past few days, Gu Fuzhou has been running to his house whenever he had nothing to do. By this point, to say that there were merely adoptive brothers was simply impossible. However, he wasn't in the right frame of mind to be thinking about it.

When Gu Fuzhou learned that Xiao Cheng had a 30% chance of surviving, he was not optimistic. "If Hu Ji says it's thirty percent, then it's at least ninety percent."

"How so?"

"Xiao Cheng is the protagonist of the original book and protagonists always have a halo around them. If I were to explain it to you, hmm, even if a wave of

arrows were shot at Xiao Cheng, he may emerge unscathed."

Lin Qingyu said, "In short, he's very lucky?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "You could put it that way."

"Shen Huaishi is also a protagonist. Won't he also have a halo?"

Yeah. Don't look at how miserable he might be now. He definitely won't die. If anyone else were to try to assassinate the Crown Prince, the best they could hope for is to emerge equally injured. He stabbed Xiao Cheng in the chest and still managed to escape unscathed. Wouldn't you call that a halo?

Lin Qingyu was suspicious. "That Shen Huaishi could escape from the palace, wasn't it because of his skills?"

As the two were talking, Huan Tong came to tell them that an unknown child had came knocking on their door. When he opened the gate, the little boy

stuffed a note into his hand without saying a word. By the time he came back to his senses, the child had already disappeared.

“Where’s the note?” Lin Qingyu said, “Bring it to me to see.”

Only a few words were written on the note. After Lin Qingyu saw it, he immediately ordered: “Prepare the carriage. I’m heading to Changsheng Temple.”

Lin Qingyu changed into his everyday clothes and together with Gu Fuzhou, went to Changsheng Temple. Before getting off the carriage, Lin Qingyu said, “It might be better that you wait for me in the carriage.”

“Huh? Why?”

“There are a lot of people here. Are you willing to let other see you going out with a ‘widow’?”

Gu Fuzhou pretended to consider it for a while, “It seems that I’m somewhat willing.”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t help laughing. “Let’s go together then.”

The autumn rain was falling outside, fluttering, sprinkling, dampening clothes and moistening desires. Gu Fuzhou got out of the carriage first. He opened the umbrella, helping Lin Qingyu down. Lin Qingyu put his hand on his palm and borrowing his support, alighted from the carraige. As soon as he stood firm on

the ground, he let go of the other's hand. He then heard a cold snort come from behind him, "Such indecent behavior!"

Lin Qingyu looked back and saw an old man, glaring at them with righteous indignation, as though he'd been made to bear witness to something filthy.

Gu Fuzhou asked in a low voice, "Who is that?"

"Deputy Censor, Yang Geng."

Gu Fuzhou said leisurely, "He's already so old but he's still a fifth-rank civil servant like you. If I were him, I would write the word 'miserable' down the length of my trousers in blood."

Yang Geng saw them sheltering under an umbrella together, even huddling close together to whisper to each other. He couldn't make out what they were

saying and they covered their faces with their sleeves as though wanting to be invisible.

Gu Fuzhou called him to a stop. “Yang Daren.”

All censors were of a somewhat surly nature and Yang Geng was no exception. With a ‘stinky’ expression on his face, he walked up to Gu Fuzhou and saluted, “This official offers his greetings to the general.”

Gu Fuzhou asked, “Just who were you calling indecent just now?”

“Naturally, this official was not pertaining to the general.” Yang Geng looked sternly at Lin Qingyu and said, “Imperial Physician Lin, if I remember correctly, it has not yet been a year since Young Master Hou departed from

this world. You should still be well within the period of mourning. How can you be so intimate with other men?"

Gu Fuzhou said, "Imperial Physician Lin is this general's adopted brother."

"An adopted brother is still a male outsider."

"According to what you said, the Emperor is also a male outsider. Imperial Physician Lin goes to examine His Majesty's pulse every day. Are you calling the Emperor indecent?"

Yang Geng glared straight at him. Flustered and exasperated, he said, "The general is twisting my words and forcing logic. How could this be the same—"

"How is it different?" Gu Fuzhou said indifferently, "Imperial Physician Lin's position was bestowed by the Emperor and the Emperor did so heedless of his identity as a male wife. Since Yang Daren feels so strongly about this matter, might it not be better to tell the Emperor and have His Majesty relieve Imperial Physician Lin of his post?"

"This…" Yang Geng was struck speechless. There was no one in the palace who didn't know that it was thanks to Lin Qingyu that the Emperor managed to awaken. Asking His Majesty to dismiss Lin Qingyu was akin to threatening the Emperor's well-being. Although the Dayu wouldn't kill an imperial censor for

offering advice to the emperor, no one would dare say this to His Majesty at this time.

Lin Qingyu said: “General, we have urgent business to attend to. Let us go.”

The two walked towards the main hall. Just as Gu Fuzhou was about to curse out that Yang Geng, he heard Lin Qingyu snort coldly, “Stupid c*nt.”

Gu Fuzhou was momentarily taken aback, thinking he had heard it wrong. “What did you just call him?”

“Stupid c*nt?”

Gu Fuzhou was shocked into incoherency. “How can you talk like that?!”

“I learned it from you.” Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes at him, “What? You can say it, but I can’t?”

“Of course, beauties mustn’t use such foul language.”

Lin Qingyu said disdainfully, “I’m going to burst.”

Gu Fuzhou blamed himself bitterly, “I have led you astray.”

On such a rainy day, the number of pilgrims in Changsheng Temple was much less than usual. There were only a few people burning incense and praying in

front of the golden Buddha statue. Lin Qingyu looked around and saw nothing out of the ordinary.

The person who wrote the note invited him to meet him at Changsheng Temple. It was unlikely that he meant in the main hall. At this time, a little

monk stepped forward and asked if they would like to offer incense. Lin Qingyu asked for three sticks of incense.

Gu Fuzhou asked, “What blessing would you like to pray for?”

Even in front of the Buddha, Lin Qingyu made no attempt to hide his malice. “I pray that Xiao Cheng will die soon.”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “How are you so cute? However, praying at Changsheng Temple doesn’t seem very fitting.”

Lin Qingyu lit the incense and asked casually, “Have you tried it?”

“Yes.” Gu Fuzhou said absent-mindedly, “If prayers here came true, you wouldn’t have sad moments.”

Lin Qingyu bumped his chest and looked up at the person beside him. Gu Fuzhou didn’t seem to realize what he’d said, so he looked at Lin Qingyu and asked, “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“…It’s nothing.” Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes, “I’ll go have a look in the side hall. The last time I met him at Changsheng Temple, it was in the side hall.”

Gu Fuzhou nodded: “You go.” As he was not familiar with Shen Huaishi, it was not appropriate to meet at this time. “I’ll go to the back hall to see if Xu

Junyuan is there."

"The National Teacher?" Lin Qingyu frowned, "Are you going to tell him… about you?"

"I'm not going to go that far. At most, I'll ask him for a divination."

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou separated and went to the side hall alone. The side hall was even more deserted than the main hall. There wasn't even a single monk standing in attendance. Lu Wancheng's tablet and ever-burning lamp were enshrined here. As Lin Qingyu was adding lamp oil to the ever-burning lamp, he caught sight from out the corner of his eyes, a figure hiding behind a stone pillar.

Lin Qingyu turned around and said, "I'm the only one here."

Shen Huaishi walked out from behind the stone pillar and said with a numb expression, "Imperial Physician Lin."

Shen Huaishi was wearing the rough sewn clothes of an ordinary citizen. His face was covered with a layer of dust, stubble covered his chin and his eyes

were bloodshot. He looked extremely down and depressed. Who knows how long he has last slept.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Where have you been these past few days?”

Shen Huaishi didn’t seem to hear Lin Qingyu’s question. He said as though speaking to himself, “Thank you, Imperial Physician Lin, for telling me about the Heavenly Prison Sect.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Does Xiao Cheng’s injury have something to do with you?”

Hearing the word “Xiao Cheng”, Shen Huaishi’s eyes moved, but he still didn’t answer the question. “I ask Imperial Physician Lin to take care of Zhu Dage. Please let him return to Xuzhou, return him to a peaceful life.”

“What about you? Where are you going?” Lin Qingyu said, “Can you escape the pursuit of the Tianji Camp?”

The corner of Shen Huaishi’s lips twitched, revealing an ugly smile. “Are you… are you concerned about me?” He slowly lowered his head, “No one has ever

been concerned about me except my family. Imperial Physician Lin, if I stop holding myself cheap, will you treat me as a friend?"

Lin Qingyu softly spoke one word, "Maybe."

A gleam of light flashed in Shen Huaishi's eyes but he quickly returned to numbness. "Unfortunately, it's too late."

Lin Qingyu made no comment. He took out from his sleeve, a medicine box he had prepared earlier that morning. "This, please accept it."

"…what is it?"

"A medicine that fakes death. You can use it to get away if necessary."

Shen Huaishi put away the medicine box. "Thank you. Then…" He stared intently at Lin Qingyu, "I'm leaving."

Lin Qingyu watched him leave. Suddenly, he said, "Did you miss that night, or did your heart go soft?"

Shen Huaishi paused. He shook his head in silence and step by step, he walked out of the side hall. Until the end, he didn't tell Lin Qingyu the answer.

For a while, Lin Qingyu remained there by himself. When he went out, he saw Gu Fuzhou standing under the eaves, looking at the hazy curtain of rain,

seemingly lost in thought.

Raindrops dripped from the eaves and splattered against the mossy stone steps, startling Gu Fuzhou out of his thoughts. “It’s over? Did you see him?”

Lin Qingyu nodded, “He said some useless nonsense.” He paused, then said, “Well, not completely nonsense. In short, Shen Huaishi has to leave the capital.”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “Xiao Cheng will definitely go and look for him when he wakes up. He runs, he chases. Even with wings, they would never fly.”

Lin Qingyu said, displeased, “Do you still think Xiao Cheng will wake up?”

“Whether Xiao Cheng lives or dies, we have to prepare for the worst.”

“The worst is that he lives and remains crown prince. In that case, we can’t touch the Emperor.”

But the emperor has obviously begun to have thoughts about him. Maybe one day, he would be asked to remain and serve him in bed. It wasn’t only Gu Fuzhou who needed a second marriage; he needed it too.

“Then, the matter of our second marriage will be put on the agenda.” Gu Fuzhou confirmed again, “Qingyu, do you really not want to take me as your

wife?”

Lin Qingyu weighed the matter over and over. “No, I don’t.”

Not to mention the fact that he didn’t want to, even if he did, a first-rank general being a wife to a fifth-rank imperial physician, this would be a direct provocation to the censorate of the entire Dayu.

Gu Fuzhou didn’t give up. “You really don’t to? Would you rather die than take me as your wife?”

“……En.”

Gu Fuzhou couldn’t figure out Lin Qingyu’s thoughts. “Could it be that you’re willing to be my wife? That can’t be, right? Didn’t you always think that it’s a humiliation for a man to wear bridal attire?”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Humiliating or not, I’ve already gone through it twice.”

“Twice?” Gu Fuzhou said in surprise, “How did it become twice?”

Lin Qingyu was momentarily dazed. He then chuckled, “I remembered it wrong.”

“Qingyu…?” Lin Qingyu’s smile hadn’t been a sneer. Rather, it carried a bit of gentleness and calmness. But for some reason, Gu Fuzhou felt that his smile

was a little sad.

The author has something to say:

The atmosphere is a little sad, so let's talk about something amusing to lighten the mood.

63

Chapter 62

After the attempt at Xiao Cheng's life, the Emperor had to force himself to handle government affairs despite being ill. His headache was getting worse and worse. He was now dependent on the Lin Family's accupuncture treatments to ease the pain. Every time it was Lin Qingyu's turn to be on duty, he was almost always on standby in the Emperor's palace. Even if while he was on break but in the palace grounds, he would be summoned by the emperor from time to time.

In the eyes of the emperor, Lin Qingyu had a gentle temperament. He never said anything unnecessary and he even carried a light medicinal fragrance on his body. This same kind of fragrance was also found on Chu Zhengde but on Chu Zhengde, he found it pungnet but on Lin Qingyu, it became refreshing. Especially when massaging the acupuncture points on his head for him, the beauty would lower his eyes and remain silent thoughout. His flawless skin glowed faintly under the palace lanterns.

Seeing so much of Lin Qingyu, he now found the other beauties in his harem dull and boring. It was a pity that he was in a bad mood right now. With such a big incident befalling the Eastern Palace, he simply didn't have the energy to consider this matter. a big thing happened in the East Palace, he didn't have the

heart to think about it at all. During the times his breath is taken away by Lin Qingyu's beauty, all he could do was heave a sigh.

Nowadays, he doesn't bother having his concubines attend to him in his illness. He left only Xue Ying and Lin Qingyu, surrounding himself with silence.

On this day, Lin Qingyu was ordered to go to the Emperor's palace but was stopped by Xue Ying at the door. "Imperial Physician Lin, the Emperor is discussing business inside. Please wait for a while."

"Is the Prime Minister inside?" It was the Prime Minister who was in charge of running the government these days. Any important matter that the ministers had to report to His Majesty were all conveyed through him.

Xue Ying and Lin Qingyu had been serving the Emperor together for a long time and they have gradually became more familiar with each other. Xue Ying didn't hide it from him. "It's the leader of the Tianji Camp, Xie Daren."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "I see."

It must be because of the assassination attempt on Xiao Cheng. As soon as Xiao Cheng's incident happened, Shen Huaishi disappeared. The Tianji Camp

would follow this trail and track him down. No one know how their investigation has been going.

After Xie Daren withdrew, Lin Qingyu entered the Emperor's sleeping chambers. The emperor sat at the dragon's desk, a solemn expression on his face. It seemed that Tianji Camp hadn't brought him any good news.

The emperor waived off Lin Qingyu's salute and said feebly, "I have a headache again, come and give me a massage."

Lin Qingyu went to stand behind the emperor and massaged his forehead for him. The emperor's expression softened a little and he closed his eyes to enjoy it. "Your technique is really good."

Lin Qingyu said, "This official learned all these from my father. My technique is nothing compared to my father's."

"Lin Rushan?" The emperor remembered this demoted former Yuan Pan, "He is a person of true talent, only that he is a bit presumptuous. It was not wrong of the Crown Prince to punish him, but it is indeed a waste of talent to prevent him from practicing his craft. Right now, the Imperial Hospital is in need of

people. Convey my order, Lin Rushan shall be reinstated to his post as Yuan Pan of the Imperial Hospital."

Lin Qingyu wanted to kneel down to offer his thanks on behalf of his father. But the emperor grabbed his hand. "No need to be too polite. Continue your massage for me."

Xiao Cheng was not yet dead and the Emperor could not die either. Lin Qingyu suppressed his disgust and pretended to be respectful and obedient.

Thanks to his massage, the Emperor's head no longer hurt so much. He once again unfurled the reports and forced himself to read them.

Lin Qingyu said, "Your Majesty's is in ill health. Mental stress must be avoided."

The emperor sighed. "Now that the Crown Prince is also ill, if I do not concern myself with these things, who will concern themselve over these things for me?"

"The Crown Prince isn't the Emperor's only son."

The emperor narrowed his eyes dangerously. "What did you say?"

Lin Qingyu made himself appear to panic. He knelt down and said, "This official spoke out of turn. I ask the Emperor to forgive me."

The emperor looked at the beauty who was so frightened that his face paled. He felt that he himself might have been overly-suspicious. He was a mere imperial physician, what schemes could he possibly get up to? "Get up. What you said was not unreasonable. It's a pity that the two remaining princes…"

Thinking of this, the emperor's head began to ache again and the words on the reports began to blur.

Seeing his bitter expression, Lin Qingyu said, "You Majesty's health is the most important thing. It would be better for the Emperor to take a rest first."

The Emperor nodded. "Alright. I will have to rely on you to help me get ready for bed."

Lin Qingyu stared at the emperor's throat. "Yes."

Lin Qingyu helped the emperor up and walked towards the dragon bed. Suddenly, he said, "There is one matter this official wishes to apologize for and seek the Emperor's punishment."

"Oh? What crime have you committed?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Recently, my mother has been feeling unwell. This official and his righteous brother, General Gu, went to Changsheng Temple to offer incense and pray for my mother. At the entrance of the temple, we met the imperial censor Yang Geng, Yang Daren. Yang Daren said that a male wife is an inauspicious thing and that this official was still within the period of mourning and thus should not be so close to other men. If this official brings any ill to

General Gu, even if this official were to die a thousand deaths, it would not suffice."

The emperor let out a groan in his heart. The tragic situation of the Nan'an Hou's mansion was vivid in everyone's mind and the Nan'an Hou has only slightly improved after Lin Qingyu departed from the mansion. With regards to these kinds of things, it was better to believe than to not.

"Withdraw first," the emperor said, "let Xue Ying come in and serve me."

Lin Qingyu walked out of the bedchamber. He saw Xue Ying hurriedly approaching and asked, "Eunuch Xue, why are you in such a hurry?"

Xue Ying said happily, "It's the Crown Prince – the Crown Prince is awake!"

Lin Qingyu laughed: "This… is indeed a happy event."

Back at the Imperial Hospital, Hu Ji told Lin Qingyu that although the Crown Prince was awake, most of his body had broken down to the extent that to what degree he'd be able to recover would depend on his recuperation in the days to come. When he woke up, he became even more temperamental and irritable than before. One concubine who had been serving him by his sickbed was only slightly clumsy but was sent to the cold palace to spend her days together with Side Concubine Lu.

Hu Ji had also seen Xie Daren of the Tianji Camp in the Eastern Palace and even overheard a conversation between him and the crown prince. The crown

prince seemed to not even be at all interested in the affairs of the court. Heedless of anything, he desperately wanted to capture the assassin and bring him back to the capital. The crown prince repeatedly emphasized that he must be kept alive.

After Lin Qingyu left the palace, he went directly to the General's Mansion. Yuan Yin welcomed him into the mansion and said, "The general is training at the military grounds."

When Lin Qingyu came to the military grounds, he saw Gu Fuzhou with his upper body bare, his stomach to the ground, his body in a straight line. He

propped himself up and down, muttering under his breath, “Seventy-seven, seventy-eight, seventy-nine…”

“General,” Yuan Yin said, “Imperial Physician Lin is here.”

“Eighty…!” Gu Fuzhou breathed a sigh of relief, got up and took the shirt handed to him by a servant. He put it on carelessly and joked, “Ah, I was seen by Imperial Physician Lin. How embarassing.”

Lin Qingyu’s bad mood at learning of Xiao Cheng waking up from his coma eased a bit. “I’ve helped you take a bath. There’s no part of you I haven’t seen.”

Gu Fuzhou sent the servant away and said, “That’s the body from the past. You haven’t seen my current body before.”

“I can’t have a look yet?”

Gu Fuzhou complained, “We’re you the one who said my abs were getting loose. You can look once I’ve trained them back into shape.” Gu Fuzhou wiped his sweat with the hem of his clothes. “I’m exhausted – I’m so exhausted. I used to be able to play ball for hours on end and still not get tired. The years are so unforgiving…”

Lin Qingyu interrupted him. “Xiao Cheng is awake.”

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows, not surprised at all. “What did I tell you? Xiao Cheng has a halo. He’s not going to die that easily. But we aren’t completely

defeated. The Emperor might not be able to tolerate a weak and sickly Crown Prince who has no intention to govern. What happens in the future depends on whether Xiao Cheng can strive for himself."

But these can only be seen as time went on.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "As for our second marriage, we should do it as soon as possible."

Gu Fuzhou paused and the corner of his mouth raised in a smile. "Now you'r in such a hurry?"

Thinking about the emperor's various actions, Lin Qingyu said, "Since it has been decided, delaying it might simply lead to more trouble. Or, have you changed your mind and want to marry the Seventh Princess?"

"Of course not. But have you really thought about it?"

Lin Qingyu asked back, "Do I seem like I haven't thought well and good about?"

"What I mean is, have you ever thought about what we're going to do after we get married…" Gu Fuzhou's tone was a little unnatural, "Uh, how would we get along?"

Lin Qingyu was stunned by this question and he said, hesitantly, "We're getting married because we have no choice. How we get along now will naturally be…

how we will get along in the future."

Gu Fuzhou pouted and said in a low voice, "If you say so, then I won't propose seriously."

Lin Qingyu didn't understand. "Propose what?"

"Here, take this."

Gu Fuzhou flicked a shot with his hand and a golden object slid across the air, which Lin Qingyu firmly caught.

It was a ring of pure gold, much thinner than the ornamental thumb rings often worn by men. It had a simple relief engraved on it, small and delicate.

Lin Qingyu cast a confused look at Gu Fuzhou. "What does this mean?"

Gu Fuzhou explained, "In my hometown, it is a tradition to wear a ring on your ring finger when you decide to get married."

"Is that so?" Lin Qingyu often heard Gu Fuzhou talk about his hometown. It must be such a bizarre world. In summer, there was something called an "air conditioner", which saved Gu Fuzhou's life for the better half of every year. In his hometown, it would take only an hour to travel the distance between Yongliang and the capital. There, men who were 18 years old were adults but

they couldn't get married until they were 22. If he and Gu Fuzhou went back there, no one would recognize their marriage.

Since they met, it had been Gu Fuzhou following their customs. Occassionally, he should respect the rules of Gu Fuzhou's hometown.

Lin Qingyu picked up the ring and was about to put it on his ring finger but was loudly stopped by Gu Fuzhou, "What are you doing?"

Lin Qingyu asked, puzzled, "Didn't you say I have to wear it?"

Gu Fuzhou couldn't help laughing. "You can't put it on yourself. Ask me to help you put it on."

"Is this also a rule in your hometown?"

"That's right"

"So troublesome." Lin Qingyu stretched out his left hand, "Then, you come and do it."

Gu Fuzhou's expression suddenly became serious. He lowered his head and for a while, he stared at Lin Qingyu's hand. He first wiped his hands with a

handkerchief and then carefully picking up the ring.

His hands seemed to be shaking a little. He was nervous.

Lin Qingyu had never seen Gu Fuzhou take something so seriously before; it was as if he was accomplishing the most important thing in his life. Seeing him like this, Lin Qingyu also started feeling nervous.

It must be because Gu Fuzhuo held the ring for so long, the metal had grown a but warm. He slowly pushed it to go round his finger, leaving a dazzling afterimage in the sunlight.

It was a strange feeling. After putting on the ring, the two did not speak for a while.

Lin Qingyu calmed down and asked, “Is it alright now?”

“Wait, at a moment like this I ought to say something a bit pretentious. Let me think about it…” Gu Fuzhou took a deep breath, grabbed Lin Qingyu’s hand and placed it on his chest. He said, voice filled with emotion, “Then, Qingyu, I entrust the rest of my life to you.”

The rest of his life? Not marrying a wife and having children but staying with Gu Fuzhou til the end, making jokes, laughing and cursing, occasionally

conspiring to do bad things together and supporting each other for the rest of their lives?

It seemed… acceptable.

“En.”

Hearing Lin Qingyu’s agreement, Gu Fuzhou couldn’t help reaching for a mile after having gotten an inch. “Then promise me, even if I’m bald, fat and without any abdominal muscles, you won’t dislike me, okay?”

Lin Qingyu quickly calmed down and mercilessly took back his hand. “Impossible.”

The author has something to say: Salted Fish Jiang, a male high school student who travels to a different world and still tries to maintain the traditions of his hometown. (This is the ring around his finger on the cover.)

64

Chapter 63

After Lin Rushan was reinstated, serving by the emperor's side was handed over to him. Lin Qingyu finally didn't have to look at the emperor's face, so similar to Xiao Cheng's, every day. Father Lin's medical skills were superior to Lin Qingyu's. With his wonderful hands, the emperor's condition got better day by day. Although he had yet to recover, the frequency of his headaches had decreased and as long as he didn't get sick, he could go about like most ordinary people.

In the Eastern Palace, Xiao Cheng's injury seemed to be getting better. However, that sword wound damaged his very core and no amount of recuperating would return him to his past condition. The day-to-day consumption of medicines made his already not-so-good temperament even more violent and volatile.

The Tianji Camp had long lost any clue of Shen Huaishi's whereabouts and Xiao Cheng couldn't bring himself to care about anything else. The Emperor, in consideration for him having met such a devastating setback, was indulgent of his various disagreeable behaviors. However, he still sent Xue Ying to, through innuendo, deliver reminders to the crown prince. It had very little effect.

How could someone as arrogant and conceited as Xiao Cheng endure being turned into a medicine jar? What made him even more resentful was that it

was Shen Huaishi, who had grown up with him, who made him like this.

How much had he schemed, how many people had he killed, to get to where he was today? Only to fall to a shadow guard. How could he possibly be reconciled? He would never give up until he brings Shen Huaishi back for him to slaughter.

In the emperor's sleeping chamber, Lin Rushan had just finished performing acupuncture for the emperor. The emperor's body was relieved, but his heart was discontent. Although Lin Qingyu and Lin Rushan were father and son, their appearances were not very similar. Lin Rushan was just an average handsome man but Lin Qingyu's radiance and beauty was a true rarity. If it weren't for the inauspiciousness of a male wife, he would not have replaced him.

When Lin Rushan was about to withdraw, the emperor asked casually, "What has Lin Qingyu been doing recently?"

Lin Rushan's face changed slightly and he said, "My son has been in the Imperial Hospital for the past few days, dispensing medicine for His Majesty."

The emperor hesitated, thoughts of inauspiciousness weighed on his heart. He waved his hand. "Forget it. You may withdraw."

Lin Rushan returned to his residence with his worries on mind. Then, he saw a majestic Ferghana horse standing by the entrance of the Lin Residence. He recognized this horse. This was Gu Fuzhou's steed, only that it was a lot fatter

than it was in the past. He hurriedly entered the residence and asked the housekeeper, “Did General Gu come visit?”

The housekeeper, a strange expression on his face, said, “Ye-yes, the General is inside, drinking tea with the Madam and the Eldest Young Master.”

Lin Rushan said, “Qingyu has returned as well?” Perfect timing; he wanted to remind him to be careful of the emperor.

When he reached the courtyard, Lin Rushan realized that it wasn’t only the two of them who had come. There were a lot of new faces in the yard; all of them must be from the General’s Mansion. Yuan Yin of the General’s Mansion was instructing them to bring in mahogany boxes one after the other. The mahogany boxes were tied with festive red silk, like they would be if they were being used to propose marriage. The point was, the Lin Residence has no daughters.

Lin Rushan walked into the main hall, mind full of doubts, only to see that his wife’s face was even more complicated than that of the housekeeper’s. Seeing

him come back, Mother Lin, as though having been relieved of a great burden, seemed to locate her backbone. “Master.”

Lin Rushan first saluted Gu Fuzhou, who quickly helped him back up. He asked, “General, this is…”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “Adoptive Father, I’m here on my behalf to propose a marriage.”

Lin Rushan and his wife looked at each other. “Dare I ask the general, to whom are you here to propose marriage?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Me.”

Compared to Gu Fuzhou coming to propose marriage, what shocked Father Lin and Mother Lin more was the attitude of their eldest son. Last time, when the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion came to propose a marriage, Lin Qingyu viewed being a male wife as an utter disgrace and almost found death preferable. However, in the end he had to obey, unable to go against the Imperial decree. Why was he was so calmly agreeing this time?

Gu Fuzhou patiently explained to the two, “The Emperor intends to bestow a marriage upon me. The candidate he has chosen for me is either his own daughter or the one of the daughters of those civil servants. In my view, none of these girls can be trusted. Keeping any of them by my side, would be akin to

raising a tiger. Therefore, I wish to settle my marriage before the Emperor's decree arrives."

Mother Lin still couldn't understand, "The general is wise, divine and mighty, a peerless hero. There must be many women who truly admire the General. The General could choose an admirable lady from any of the military families. Why would you insist on marrying my family's Qingyu?"

Faced with this question, Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu for help. Lin Qingyu didn't want to worry his parents and so he hadn't told them about his situation in the palace. At this moment, he simply said, "The Lin Residence has been under the protection of the General. Marrying the General, the advantages would outweigh the disadvantages, for me and for the Lin Residence."

Mother Lin didn't understand this. She still remembered the humiliation her son suffered the first time he was made to be a male wife. She looked to her husband. "Master…"

Lin Rushan, who was silent for a long time, said, "I understand."

His eldest son did this not only to help General Gu, but also to avoid disaster for himself. The Emperor has already begun to have such thoughts about Qingyu. Maybe one day, another Imperial decree would come down, ordering

him to enter the harem as an attendant. By then, it would be too late to think of a way out.

Lin Qingyu had once been a male wife. Finding a girl from a well-matched family… even if someone were to be willing, he himself could not agree. It would be better for the two to get together in this way and take care of each other in the future.

“Since you two have already considered this matter, we will not object.” Lin Rushan said, “Only that, I am afraid His Majesty might not agree so easily.”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “Do not worry, Father-in-law, just leave this matter to me.”

He called him “Father-in-law” so quickly and with such practiced ease that it shocked everyone except Lin Qingyu.

Seeing that the men were going to settle the matter like this, Mother Lin couldn’t help but say, “But, it hasn’t been a year since Young Master Hou passed away.”

Her husband wasn’t sensitive enough and he might not have been able to see it. After Lu Wancheng left, Lin Qingyu remained calm and unruffled on the surface; he shed not even a single tear for Lu Wancheng. He has been like this

since he was a child; his emotions were not so easily exposed. Only she, as his mother, knew that Qingyu had felt more distressed than anyone.

Gu Fuzhou said, “Is Mother-in-law worried about rumors?”

Mother Lin hesitated. “It’s not just this…”

Lin Qingyu knew what his mother meant. “Do not worry, Mother,” Lin Qingyu whispered, “I have long forgotten Young Master Hou. Who is Lu Wancheng and what does he have to do with me?”

Gu Fuzhou: “…”

With Lin Qingyu having said so, Mother Lin had nothing left to say.

The rings had been given and with the acquiescence of Lin Qingyu’s family, Gu Fuzhou entered the palace immediately without delay. Lin Qingyu was going to accompany his parents for dinner at home before leaving.

Lin Qinghe took the opportunity to stick to his brother and asked, “Gege, do you really want to marry General Gu?”

He had not been allowed to listen in on the adults’ discussion but he still

learned of this matter from his momo.

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Yes.”

“But, the General, he… he’s too old.” Lin Qinghe said, feeling aggrieved for his brother, “He’s twelve years older than Gege!”

Lin Qingyu smiled. “He’s not that old.” In terms of actual age, Gu Fuzhou was even a year younger than him.

Lin Qinghe begged, “Gege, can’t you find another husband like Wancheng Ge?”

Lin Qingyu told his younger brother that if he did not marry the general who was twelve years older, he might be taken as a male concubine by an old man forty years older. Lin Qinghe then reluctantly agreed to the marriage.

Meanwhile, Gu Fuzhou met the emperor in Qinzheng Hall. The emperor’s complexion had improved by more than a little. It probably won’t be long before he appears in morning court.

“Aiqing has come just in time.” The emperor said, “Have a look at Zhao Mingwei’s urgent report from Yongliang.”

Zhao Mingwei said in his urgent report that Xixia, after several months of recuperation, had returned in a swirl of dust and that the momentum of their return was strong. They have successively captured three small cities of the

Dayu. After several defeats, morale in the army was unstable. General Gu was urgently needed back at Yongliang to preside over the overall situation.

Gu Fuzhou remained calm, but thousands of horses were galloping in his heart. He had no misconceptions on just how much of an influence he could have over the overall situation. Winning streaks depend on luck and they were bound to be followed by a losing streak. Quitting while he was ahead kept his win rate high. Zhao Mingwei has engaged in hundreds of battles and his win rate may be only 60%, but it was much more secure than his 100% win rate in just five battles.

The emperor once again said, “I told you before that you may have entered the capital alone, but I wish to see you leave the capital as one of a pair. The day before yesterday, because of the Crown Prince’s sudden illness, the matter of your marriage was delayed. Now, it can not be delayed any longer. You should settle matters of your home first, that way, there would be no need for you to worry while you are in Yongliang. The Empress has introduced you to many noble ladies; do you have a favorite candidate in your heart?”

Gu Fuzhou closed the memorial and said, “Speaking of this matter, I have gone to National Teacher Xu to ask for a divination regarding my marriage.”

“Oh?” The Emperor had always respected the enigmatic National Teacher, “What did he say?”

“The National Teacher said that this Minister should take a male wife, a man born on the eleventh day of the third month of the Year of Guiwei. Only in this

way, might I have divine help on the battlefield."

"A male wife?" The emperor frowned, "Did the National Teacher really say that?"

"Indeed. Your Majesty had once made an exception to allow the late Young Master Hou to marry a male wife. I hope His Majesty will make another exception for this minister."

The emperor said, "Do you know there is talk about the inauspiciousness of a male wife?"

"The National Teacher said that auspiciousness and ominousness depends on the person. A male wife might be ominous to others, but to this minister, it is an auspicious sign."

Given the precedent, it was not so easy for the Emperor to refuse. And so he said, "Have you found the man with the matching Eight Characters?"

"I have. By coincidence, my adopted brother, the imperial physician Lin Qingyu, was born on the eleventh day of the third month in the Year of Guiwei."

The emperor suddenly rose to his feet. "Lin Qingyu, you mean Lin Qingyu?"

He got up too suddenly and his body was not in good shape. It was inevitable that he would be a little unsteady on his feet. Xue Ying hurriedly stepped

forward to help, “Your Majesty, please look after your body.”

The emperor realized his loss of control and said, “Lin Qingyu is an extraordinary talent in the Imperial Hospital. My continued health is dependent on him. How could he possibly marry you?”

Gu Fuzhou said, “This presents no conflict. Since Imperial Physician Lin is a man who has already entered office, he shall continue to perform his duties in the future just as he has done so in the past. This minister has no need for him to serve as madam of the household.”

“Ridiculous.” The emperor slammed his hand on the table, “How could I allow a male wife to hold a fifth-rank official position, mingling with the civil and military officials in the palace!”

Gu Fuzhou’s tone became a little colder, “Imperial Physician Lin used to be a male wife. Despite this, Your Majesty still gave him an official position. Imperial Physician Lin came up with the cure for the epidemic and the medicine for Your Majesty’s headaches. It is in consideration for the Emperor’s health that this minister is willing to allow my wife to continue serving in the palace.”

The emperor said coldly, “I have yet to agree and already you call him ‘wife’?”

Gu Fuzhou raised the corner of his lips slightly, “As Your Majesty has said, I should settle matters of my home first, that way, there would be no need for

me to worry while I am in Yongliang." Gu Fuzhou knelt down and saluted, "I ask that the Emperor grant this permission."

Hearing the threat in Gu Fuzhou's words, the emperor grew furious and a fierce headache bore down upon him. Unable to attend to anything else, he cradled his head and said impatiently, "Relay my word to Lin Rushan!"

News that Lin Qingyu was going to remarry Gu Fuzhou spread like wildfire. After a lapse of more than a year, the Lin Residence has once again become a talking point for after dinner gossip among the capital's rich and powerful families. It might be more accurate to say that the Lin Residence hasn't

stopped being the subject of rumors since the day Lin Qingyu married Lu Wancheng.

There were many rumors about Lin Qingyu in the Imperial Hospital. Several times, Hu Ji wanted to ask Lin Qingyu what was going on. But seeing the other party carry on like it was nothing, he swallowed the words once again.

Lin Qingyu hated people who talked too much. If you wanted to make friends with him, you needed to know what to and what not to say.

On this day, when Hu Ji came back from a doctor's visit, he caught sight of several censors walking together, talking about Lin Qingyu's remarriage.

"Although there is precedent for a male wife, the precedent proved unsightly. How could General Gu ask to marry a widowed male wife? I simply don't understand it."

"I heard that he asked the National Teacher for a divination and that the National Teacher said that Lin Qingyu could prosper him."

"Nonsense! Gu Fuzhou must have been bewitched by Lin Qingyu's beauty, so he asked the National Teacher to endorse him. With how much he indulges in homosexuality, would he not fall prey to a honey trap by the enemy?"

"In my opinion, it must have been Lin Qingyu who took the initiative to seduce him. Lin Qingyu, instead of doing his duty to remain a widow for his late husband, insists of going about being an imperial physician, head

uncovered. I wouldn't be surprised by anything he does. It's a pity that he has sullied General Gu's good name…"

Hu Ji couldn't stand hearing these words but given his standing, he didn't have the qualifications to come forward and stop them. He was about to take a detour when he heard a voice behind him, "I say–"

He and the censors looked back together. They saw Gu Fuzhou dressed in a first-rank military uniform, two flying eagles embroidered on it. Tall and lofty in stature, a stern expression on his face, he stood in front of the group of officials. It was no exaggeration to say that he looked the very picture of a crane towering over chickens.

"That is enough." Gu Fuzhou said slowly, "Whose person do you think you are talking about?"

Gu Fuzhou's voice was unusually calm, but the faintly discernible murderous desire made everyone present feel a sense of oppression.

The censors exchanged glances and saluted him together, "This official greets General Gu."

Yang Geng dared to say, "We are all censors personally appointed by the Emperor. As censors it is our duty to strictly uphold discipline and carry out our responsibility to supervise. What we've caught wind of, we must report.

Imperial Physician Lin has behaved improperly and acted shamelessly. For what reason should we not talk about it?!"

Gu Fuzhou's eyes swept across the crowd one by one, "You listen carefully. It was I who asked the Emperor for permission to marry Imperial Physician Lin.

Imperial physician Lin was reluctant in every possible way and had no choice but to acquiesce because of my power — If you want to scold then scold."

Yang Geng said angrily, "The General is being so overbearing. Does the General intend to exchange blows with me?!"

"I can't?"

As soon as Gu Fuzhou's voice fell, the officials all exploded into an uproar.

"Of course not! This is the Imperial Palace, not the Northwest battlefield. Nor is this the general's military camp!"

Gu Fuzhou smiled, "Do you think that I have never fought in any other places save for the battlefield or the military camp?"

Yang Geng went red in the face. "Does the General have no respect for the Emperor!"

Seeing that the situation was turning serious, Hu Ji, afraid that Lin Qingyu would be implicated, rushed forward and said, "General!"

Gu Fuzhou naturally remembered this imperial doctor who was closely related to the Lin Family. "Is something wrong?"

"General, calm down. After all, this is in the palace. If it reaches the Emperor's

ears and Imperial Physician Lin is blamed, then…

Gu Fuzhou was uninterested. “Get lost.”

Gu Fuzhou had to head for Qinzheng Hall to discuss the war in the Northwest with the ministers and did not stay much longer. Hu Ji returned to the Imperial Hospital and seeing Lin Qingyu looking at some medical records, he couldn’t help but approach and leaned over.

“General Gu…,” Hu Ji shuddered, “is a bit scary.”

Lin Qingyu was a little surprised. “Why do you think so?”

Hu Ji told Lin Qingyu what he had seen and heard just now. “It’s no wonder, how many souls has General Gu claimed with his Qingyun Jiuzhou spear? Only a god of war of the Northwest like him could have overwhelmed those censors into silence with just his aura alone. However, I had always taken

General Gu to be a restrained and gentle warrior. I never expected he would pick fights outside the battlefield…”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t help but smile when he heard his words.

It seemed there was a side to his once and future husband that he had not seen.

The window laid open and a gust of wind blew through, bringing a slight chill. Lin Qingyu said, “Is it not getting colder?

Hu Ji said, “Indeed, winter is almost upon us.”

Lin Qingyu let out an unwarranted sigh. “So quickly.”

The story of winter was about to begin once again.

The author has something to say:

By fighting in some other place, does this salted fish mean that time he fought at school and was punished to write a self-reflection after being caught? ~ (dog head)

65

Chapter 64

In the end, through gritted teeth, the emperor finally agreed to Gu Fuzhou's marriage to Lin Qingyu. War was once again breaking out in the Northwest and he had to appease Gu Fuzhou at this time. Furthermore, Xu Junyuan also said that the marriage between the two was a sign of auspiciousness. For the sake of the overall situation, he could only suppress his own selfish desires. He

was the ruler of a country; between the country and a beauty, which was more important and which was less, he could still tell.

The emperor only acquiesced; he did not bestow the marriage. However, he did make a statement: A male wife may not re-enter the palace.

Hearing this, Gu Fuzhou wanted to go argue with the emperor. Lin Qingyu stopped him. “Don’t worry, it won’t be long before the Emperor invites me back.”

Gu Fuzhou pretended to complain, “Doctor Lin has done something bad again but didn’t take me with him.”

Lin Qingyu said, “I don’t think you can call this ‘something bad’.”

On the day Lin Qingyu left the palace, most of his colleagues in the Imperial Hospital watched from the sidelines. Aside from Hu Ji who saw him off all the way, Chu Zhengde unexpectedly also came to see him off.

The old man still had on an ugly expression whenever he looked at him and his words were still eccentric and cynical, “Marrying out of nowhere! You are failing to live up to your talent!”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “It is precisely because of this talent that occasionally delaying for some time should be of no matter.”

Chu Zhengde choked and he said, flustered and exasperated, “Hurry up and

go! The very sight of you is unlucky."

Lin Qingyu did not immediately depart – a eunuch from the Eastern Palace found him and said that he was being invited by the crown prince.

After many days, Lin Qingyu saw Xiao Cheng again. He almost couldn't help laughing.

After spending a period of time wandering the edge of life and death, Xiao Cheng was now far from his high-spirited self of before. He had lost almost half his weight, resulting in sunken cheeks and pale lips. Even dressed in resplendent clothes, his sorry state could hardly be concealed. In Lin Qingyu's

eyes, he was doing not much better than Shen Huaishi at Changsheng Temple that day.

When those eyes looked at Lin Qingyu, gone were his past haughtiness and rationality, his arrogance and distrust; only stubbornness and resentment remained.

Lin Qingyu delivered the standard salutation. “Greetings to Your Highness.”

Xiao Cheng did not lock eyes with him like he did in the past. He went straight to the point, “Do you have any news of Shen Huaishi?”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. “Imperial Guard Shen is His Royal Highness’s personal bodyguard. Why would His Highness ask me about him?”

Xiao Cheng’s lips were pursed tight. After so long, the Tianji Camp had yet to uncover Shen Huaishi’s whereabouts. He had nowhere to vent his restlessness and resentment. He spent all day in the Eastern Palace and no amount of smashing everything in sight could provide him release. The Tianji Camp’s shadow guard then asked tremblingly, “Asking Your Highness for pardon but does Imperial Guard Shen have any relatives or friends? We can start from these people.”

Xiao Cheng was stunned. After much pondering, he thought of Lin Qingyu.

All of Shen Huaishi’s relative and friends disappeared with the Heavenly Prison Sect three years ago. For the past three years, apart from himself, the

only person Shen Huaishi has had any significant connection with was Lin Qingyu. Otherwise, he would not have appeared to plead for Lin Qingyu on Jingchun's birthday.

"You need only to answer Gu's question. Besides, did Gu allow you ask anything?"

Lin Qingyu said, "The last time this official saw Imperial Guard Shen was at the Imperial Medical Office. I do not know what he had undertaken for Your

Highness but he was injured all over. This official simply gave him a few medicines. That is all."

"Did he tell you anything?" Xiao Cheng didn't really hold out much hope that Lin Qingyu knew anything, but he really… was at his wits' end. If there was any information, no matter how immaterial, he was going to hold on to it.

Lin Qingyu thought for a moment and said, "He mentioned the Princess Jingchun.

"Jingchun?" Xiao Cheng asked impatiently, "What did he say?"

"He said that he and the Princess Jingchun grew up together. Back then, the Princess was forced to enter a political marriage to the North. He doesn't know how she has been these past three years."

Xiao Cheng asked, "Did he say he was going to the North?"

Leading too deliberately would only make it too suspicious. Lin Qingyu said, "He never said that. He said that he was His Highness's shadow guard and so naturally, he should always remain with His Highness."

Xiao Cheng narrowed his eyes and said, "We are done here."

Before leaving, Lin Qingyu asked, "Does Your Highness know about my

marriage with General Gu?"

"I know." Xiao Cheng mocked, "Lu Wancheng's body hasn't even grown cold. You're in such a hurry to remarry. Lin Qingyu, you really can't live without a man. However, what does a warrior like Gu Fuzhou know of pleasure? And an invalid like Lu Wancheng never would have been able to satisfy you. If you had just given yourself to me sooner, you would have known the taste of marrow."

Lin Qingyu could see that Xiao Cheng was just running his mouth. In his current state, even if the Princess Jingchun came back, he might not be able produce any sort of reaction.

"Your Highness has repeatedly shown me your goodwill. I thought Your Highness wished to see me for this matter. I didn't expect that Your Highness would not even mention my marriage with General Gu, concerned only about the possible whereabouts of Imperial Guard Shen." Lin Qingyu chuckled

lightly. “It seems that in Your Highness’ heart I am far less important than Imperial Guard Shen.”

Xiao Cheng was dumbfounded, as though only realizing this himself. He then said, as if to convince himself, “Gu’s only concern is that he meet his punishment and suffer the consequences of his own action as soon as possible.”

Lin Qingyu said, “It must be as Your Highness says. – This official will now take his leave.”

Regardless of the rumors flying about outside, Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou’s marriage was finally settled. The marriage had been decided in a hurry, but under the supervision of Mother Lin and Yuan Yin, everything, from the

engagement ceremony to the selection of the day of the wedding, went smoothly.

When Lin Qingyu got married last time, he had basically prepared no dowry. This time, Mother Lin prepared a dowry list for him, but he said, “You can add a little more.”

Mother Lin looked embarrassed. “Qingyu, your father has been in office for so many years and he has kept his hands clean all throughout. This is all that he has saved.”

Lin Qingyu smiled and said, “Mother misunderstood. I am the one getting married, naturally, I shall pay my dowry myself. How could I possibly use my parents’ savings? Do not worry, Mother, I will have others handle this matter.”

Mother Lin said worriedly, “How will you pay for your dowry? How long have you been working?”

“I shall let Young Master Hou help me out.” Lu Wancheng had left him so much property; he was worried he would have nowhere to spend it.

Mother Lin was taken aback. “Th-this is not good.”

“There’s nothing wrong with it.” Lin Qingyu smiled slightly, “If Young Master Hou, down in the netherworld, even knew, he might even urge me to bring

more over to the General's Mansion."

Mother Lin only felt that she understood her eldest son less and less. However, she has never been one to interfere with Lin Qingyu's decisions and finally, she arranged for matters as Lin Qingyu wanted.

Unmarried couples were not allowed to meet in private before the wedding. Though Gu Fuzhou couldn't see him it didn't stop him from sending a lot of things one after the other. For example, the wedding dress he was going to wear was personally selected by Gu Fuzhou and was delivered to the Lin Residence by Yuan Yin.

Lin Qingyu knew that Gu Fuzhou had an inexplicable obsession with his wedding dress. He thought that Gu Fuzhou would choose a wedding dress that was even more elaborate than the one he had worn when they first got married. Unexpectedly, though the wedding dress he sent was made from excellent brocade but there wasn't much embroidery on it; it was simple scarlet dress, like a pure burning flame.

Lin Qingyu touched the ring on his ring finger; the relief on this ring too was very simple. Gu Fuzhou's vision and tastes were not bad. He himself didn't like dressing up too garishly.

A letter from Gu Fuzhou came along with the bridal attire. In colloquial speech, it was an entire page filled with his complaints about being tired and hungry these days, how he could hardly bear it any longer. Afterwards, he

lamented about human life, how it was meaningless, how it was better to jump into the lake if one can't eat meat.

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. "The General's tiredness aside, why would he be hungry?"

Yuan Yin said helplessly, "In order to motivate himself with his training, the general made his wedding attire a little smaller. He hasn't eaten much during the past few days, making do with green vegetables and radishes. Yesterday, he even grabbed me asking why do people live, just to marry a beautiful wife, the world was not worth it…"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

The current Gu Fuzhou was actually quite tall, with broad shoulders and long legs. To say that he couldn't be made better wouldn't be too much of an exaggeration; everything was just right. Lin Qingyu had deliberately said that his abdominal muscles were loosening in order to urge him to be diligent in his training. Getting in a bit more physical exercise wasn't a bad thing. Unexpectedly, it had been such a big blow to Gu Fuzhou.

Lin Qingyu laughed: "Tell him, I don't like men too thin either. Have him eat well."

The author has something to say: Finally, it's the second marriage~!

66

Chapter 65

While waiting for his wedding, Lin Qingyu stayed in the Lin Residence, never going anywhere. He had others worrying about the many matters of his wedding. He spent every day reading books and accompanying his younger brother. In a blink of an eye, it was the eve of his wedding.

That night, before Lin Qingyu had even slept for four hours, the matrons of honor, arranged by the General's Mansion, arrived. Lin Qingyu still remembered that when he married Lu Wancheng, the Hou Mansion had also sent a pair of matrons. Perhaps he had been influenced by his emotions, the last time he saw a pair of matron, he found them simply repulsive. Though he knew that they were just doing as they were instructed to do, he still held a grudge; although, in the end, he didn't seek revenge against them.

The matrons of honor who came this time were two dignified young women who waited upon him to wash and change clothes.

Lin Qingyu asked, "As I remember, a bride is asked to bathe before washing up and dressing?" After bathing, regardless whether it was a man or woman,

ointment would be applied at a certain part so as to facilitate the consummation of marriage with their husband.

That matron smiled and said, “That is indeed the rule. But General Gu said that Doctor Lin may come however he feels comfortable.”

Lin Qingyu laughed. “He is quite considerate.

Lin Qingyu still went to take a bath. Not for anything else, but to wash away the bad luck from the palace. Afterwards, the matrons dried his long hair and combed it smoothly. She asked, “Would Doctor Lin wish to wear a bridal crown?”

Lin Qingyu asked, “This decision is also up to me?”

“Yes, according to the General’s intentions, even if Imperial Physician Lin wished to wear his everyday clothes for the wedding, he would have no objections.”

How could he have no objections? If he truly were to not wearing his bridal dress to the wedding, that man would probably hang a smile on his face but would complain endlessly in his heart.

“Do me up as you would any other of your male brides.”

The matron looked carefully at Lin Qingyu’s face and said, “But what could I possibly do? No matter what I paint on Doctor Lin’s face, it would feel like

drawing feet on a snake."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Do you want a reward for such a sweet mouth?"

The matron covered her lips, smiled and said, "How could I dare? I speak but truthfully." She opened the box and chose a piece of rouge paper. "Please, Doctor Lin, press this between your lips."

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment. He took the rouge paper and pressed it between his lips. His pale lips were dyed a bright red.

The matron darkened his eyebrows and drew a huadian on his forehead. After doing so, the matron said with satisfaction, "Doctor Lin's complexion is just right, fair and flawless. I don't think there's any need to apply powder."

Even if his complexion hadn't been good enough, he wouldn't have agreed to having any applied. Gu Fuzhou could choose to look or not look. Lip rouge, darkening his brows and a huadian was the limit of what he could tolerate.

The makeup was applied very quickly and they had to wait another hour before his hair was done. The matron put on a man's special bridal crown for

him. Two servants each held one side of his bridal dress and opened it wide. “Doctor Lin, please change your clothes.”

The matron wanted to help him up but Lin Qingyu said, “I’ll do it myself.”

Arms went into the red sleeves and the servants draped bridal dress over him. When the matron tied it around his waist, she couldn’t help sighing, “Doctor Lin’s waist is as slender as a woman’s.”

The other matron joked, “You’re wrong. Not every woman’s waist is as fine as that.”

Finally, the matron covered him with the veil and his field of vision was reduced to a swath of red.

This scene seemed familiar; it was the most humiliating memory of his life. At that time, he never could have imagined there would be a day when he would be willing to become someone’s wife. Even if he and Gu Fuzhou had no choice

but to do this in order to avoid disaster, it was nonetheless incredibly unthinkable.

A thought flashed in Lin Qingyu's head: Was there really no other way out of their current predicament, apart from marrying Gu Fuzhou?

Not necessarily. But he still chose to marry Gu Fuzhou again.

After much tossing about, it was finally dawn. As soon as the auspicious time arrived, Lin Qingyu went to the main hall of the Lin Residence to say goodbye to his parents. Towards this matter of sending off their son to marry, Father Lin and Mother Lin were much more familiar with it now that they were doing ti for the second time. No matter how complicated their mood was, it was much better than last time. The two of them simply gave Lin Qingyu a few words of advice and the welcoming party arrived.

Most of the welcoming party were military officers and leading them was General Wu, who Gu Fuzhou had a good relationship with. A welcoming party filled with warrior was always bound to be lively. However, today, the men were each more refined than the other. They had been reminded by General

Gu to restrain themselves in front of the great beauty; to be on their very best behavior as they escorted him to the bridal sedan.

This was bridal sedan meant to be carried by eight people. In the Dayu, only the first wife could enjoy this honor.

The Lin Residence's son's second marriage attracted many onlookers. General Gu's fame had spread to every household. He got his first wife in his thirties and this wife happened to be a widow who has not yet been long into his widowhood. Truly, if one lives long enough, there is nothing one cannot see.

"Ever since the Emperor bestowed a marriage between two men last year, people have been copying it left and rigth. My second uncle's youngest son just

married a male wife not long ago – Public morals are degenerating with each passing day!"

"What are these people doing? They refuse to marry a perfectly nice girl and instead take home a male wife. Whatever for? They can't even bear children!

"If he were beautiful, even I would be willing to…"

"Beauty bring calamities. He has already brought a family to ruin. Now, he's going to bring calamity to our army. Who know? Maybe someday, he might bring disaster for the country!"

"Shh—you better shut your mouth if you want to keep your head!"

The bridal sedan was lifted up and step by step, it proceeded towards the General's Mansion, leaving the gossiping crowd far behind. A vast and mighty

entourage followed behind the bridal sedan, along with a procession of dowry stretching beyond what the eye could see.

The welcoming team circled around half the capital, finally stopping in front of the General's Mansion. The ceremonial official pronounced loudly, "The bridal sedan—"

The bridal sedan's curtains were lifted and Lin Qingyu was helped down the carriage and into the General's Mansion. Immediately after crossing the threshold, a hand appeared beneath his veil.

This hand was large and gentle, with thick calluses covering the finger pads. It was mottled and rough, easily recognizable as the hand of a martial artist.

When he placed his hand in the other's, Lin Qingyu heard a familiar and pleasant voice, "Our Doctor Lin is actually wearing a bridal dress."

Who else could be whispering to him at such a time?

Lin Qingyu knew it was against the rules, but he still replied, "And you don't need a rooster to be your stand-in this time."

The whispering of the two was discovered by the matron of honor. She reminded them, "General, you can not talk to the madam at this time."

Gu Fuzhou closed his mouth in a rare show of obedience. Lin Qingyu held hydrangeas in one hand and Gu Fuzhou's hand with the other. The two

entered the main hall together.

Gu Fuzhou has no parents, no relatives or elders. Sitting on the seat of honor was the old but vigorous Wu Guogong. When he received request to precede over the couple's wedding ceremony, he grinned from ear to ear, repeatedly expressing his agreement.

After offering their respects to the Heavens, Lin Qingyu was sent to the bridal chamber first. Gu Fuzhou had to stay in the front hall to deal with the guests. As soon as the beauty left, the military officers shed all restraint and swarmed Gu Fuzhou.

Gu Fuzhou's celebration party lasted from dawn to dusk. He himself would rather have not but those military officers were really bothersome. Gu Fuzhou has never been the protagonist, urged by everyone to drink. But today, for the first time, he was faced with General Wu, who, once he's had this fill, could make a complete nuisance of himself. He was made to drink until he couldn't tell east from west or north from south. In the end, it was Wu Guogong who helped him out of the siege, saying that he they shouldn't get him flat-out drunk lest he be unable to penetrate the chamber. This caused the group of men to burst into laughter.

Gu Fuzhou thought to himself, he could probably forget about any sort of penetration but he could probably make off with some advantages by using his

drunkenness as an excuse. Maybe, he could touch his hair, or get the beauty to call him 'husband' or something.

On the way to the bridal chamber, Gu Fuzhou's feet were unsteady. The closer he got to the bridal chamber, the more his steps felt like they were floating; until he felt like his entire person as floating away. Everything in front of him looked like they were from a dream.

He has married Lin Qingyu and brought him back home again. He himself had been the one to go through the ceremony with him. Later, he would lift Lin Qingyu's veil and they would share a drink as husband and wife.

What beautiful traditional culture! He just loves it so much.

Gu Fuzhou took a deep breath and placed his hands on the door with the word "Xi". He stayed that way for a long time before gently pushing open the door.

Lin Qingyu heard movement and raised his head up from his book. "Welcome back."

Gu Fuzhou was wearing robes the same color as his. He was stalwart and imposing, with sword-brows and starlit eyes. No matter from which angle, he

appered to be a mature man. Only those eyes, when they looked at him, would faintly reveal a youthful spirit that others could not discern.

The two looked at each other. Gu Fuzhou opened his mouth but no words came out. He backed out and closed the door again.

Lin Qingyu: "…?"

Before Lin Qingyu could figure out the situation, the door was pushed open again. Gu Fuzhou confirmed that he hadn't seen wrong. He said, bewildered, "Where my red veil? Where's my big red veil!"

"You mean the bridal veil?" Lin Qingyu looked at the table, "I placed it there."

Gu Fuzhou's expression froze. He stared at Lin Qingyu's face and said accusingly, "You're not supposed to do it like that, right? Shouldn't I be the one to remove the bridal veil?"

"Well, it was in the way." While the husband was drinking happily outside, the wife could only sit waiting in the bridal chamber for most the day. Thinking, this wasn't the first time they were getting married anyway and given how

familiar he and Gu Fuzhou were with each other, they could just do away with many of the rituals. So, for the rest of the day, he read one of his books.

Gu Fuzhou faintly exuded resentment. “Admit that you were wrong. Admit it quickly and I won’t be angry.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t think there was anything wrong with him removing the bridal veil. But seeing Gu Fuzhou’s appearance as though he’d been struck by lightning, he added, “But I haven’t washed my face, nor have I undressed.”

Lin Qingyu was a little peeved. He was wearing the bridal dress, with a huadian between his eyebrows and even a little rouge on his lips. No matter how unaccustomed he was to it, he didn’t wash it off. And yet, Gu Fuzhou still had it in him to criticize him.

Gu Fuzhou suddenly reacted and looked blankly at Lin Qingyu. He looked at huadian on his forehead, at his wandering eyes, at his red lips, at his bound slender waist – he looked at the beauty lovely enough to cause the downfall of a nation, wearing a wedding dress he personally selected. As he looked at him,

a little bit of grievance still remained in his eyes, as if to say: Why did you only come now?

Behind Lin Qingyu, was hazy candlelight and the character 'Xi'.

Tender as peach; shining splendidly.

Gu Fuzhou blinked. "Ah, I seem to have been coaxed by you."

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows: "So quickly?"

"I'm very good at coax-able." Gu Fuzhou walked, staggering towards Lin Qingyu, "Unlike Doctor Lin, who's super difficult to coax. It takes so long to coax each time…"

Lin Qingyu stepped forward to support him. Smelling the alcohol on him, he asked, "How much alcohol did you drink?"

Gu Fuzhou buried his head in the crook of Lin Qingyu's neck. "I didn't want to drink either. They kept refilling me glass…"

Gu Fuzhou was too heavy for Lin Qingyu to support by himself and the two stumbled onto the bridal bed together. When Gu Fuzhou fell, it was though he got stuck on the bed, unable to get back up.

Lin Qingyu asked, "Who refilled your glass for you? Remember to refill theirs

next time."

Gu Fuzhou curled his fingers and counted them off one by one. Lin Qingyu said, "You keep counting. I'll ask someone to cook some sobering soup for you."

When Lin Qingyu turned around, Gu Fuzhou, who was half-drunk, suddenly stretched out his hand and wrapped his arms around his waist from behind, dragging him back. Lin Qingyu fell back onto the bed, into Gu Fuzhou's arms.

"Qingyu."

"Hm?"

"Laopo…"

Why was it that on their wedding night…on their second wedding night, he was still calling him 'old woman'?

Lin Qingyu, using his opponent's own methods to obtain retribution, said, "Don't shout, Laogong."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and kept looking at him. He smiled so deeply that his eyes turned to starlit arches. When he had had enough of smiling, he made a "come

here" gesture. Lin Qingyu leaned over, closer. Gu Fuzhou cupped his hand next his lips, as if to tell him a little secret, "I've turned bent…"

Lin Qingyu asked, "Bent where?"

Gu Fuzhou was momentarily dumbfounded. He lay back down, covering his eyes with his arm and said aggrievedly, "You chief culprit! You don't want to take responsibility but still want to f*cking be my closest friend. But there's no

way I can turn you bent without getting your consent…You're going to infuriate me to death!"

Lin Qingyu seemed to only half-understand. "What exactly does 'bent' mean?"

Gu Fuzhou closed his eyes and said softly, "You're my type and I want to date you."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "Can't you be more specific?"

Gu Fuzhou: "…"

Lin Qingyu said again, "We haven't drank our nuptial cup yet. Are you sure you want to sleep?"

Gu Fuzhou seemed to really have fallen asleep and the only response he got was the sound of gentle breathing.

The author has something to say: Regardless where this Salted Fish is from, he usually communicates in Mandarin, so he has no accent!

But that doesn't prevent him from speaking in his dialect. He especially handsome when he sings in his dialect! ! ! (I don't care, that just the way it is!)

Chapter 66

It was early in the morning, Lin Qingyu felt someone moving beside him. He had always been a light sleeper and since it was already his usual time to wake up, he quickly opened his eyes.

He slept on the outer side of the bed and what greeted him upon waking up was the burnt out red candles and the morning light coming in from outside the window. Turning over slightly, the man beside him…or rather, the young man beside him was sound asleep, lying facing him. Half his face and one hand were exposed outside the quilt, while his other hand was splayed on his waist.

After Gu Fuzhou had passed out drunk last night, Lin Qingyu took off his wedding clothes for him and after much difficulty, managed to shove him under the quilt. He originally planned on making do with sleeping in the study but reconsidered; after all, it was their wedding night. During their previous wedding night, they hadn't even known each other and they slept in the same

room. If they were to sleep in separate rooms now, their two years of knowing each other would have been for nothing.

There is only one bed in the bridal chamber and there wasn't any luohan. Lin Qingyu thought about it and using all his might, he pushed Gu Fuzhou further in and simply lay down on the outer side of the bed.

Lin Qingyu thought that he wouldn't sleep well. However, he didn't expect that Gu Fuzhou would be so well behaved when he was asleep, even very rarely turning over. It was no wonder he could sleep through an enemy attack in Yongliang; finally having no choice but to move out with his quilt draped over his shoulders.

Though his actual age was a full nineteen years old, he still slept like a child. Lin Qingyu couldn't help but stretched out his hand and touch Gu Fuzhou's straight nose. Then, he made to get up but…

He couldn't get up. Gu Fuzhou… had pinned down his hair.

The lower half of Lin Qingyu's long hair was completely pinned down by Gu Fuzhou. If he moved a little too much, it would result in a painful pull. He tried to push Gu Fuzhou away but even after a long time, Gu Fuzhou remained motionless. He also tried to grab his hair and pull it out but not a lot of it

managed to be freed. Instead, he simply hurt himself in the process, so much so that he was tempted to poison to other.

Lin Qingyu couldn't bear it any longer. No amount of calling managed to get Gu Fuzhou to wake up so he went and pinched Gu Fuzhou's noise shut. No matter how much Gu Fuzhou loved sleeping, the obstruction to his breathing made him furrow his brows. He then opened his eyes and seeing Lin Qingyu, also opened his mouth.

Lin Qingyu said coolly, "Are you awake now?"

Awakened by such cruel means, Gu Fuzhou was still a little dazed, a layer of mist covering his eyes. He stared intently, unable to look away, at the face so close at hand. The slowly fog dissipated and his eyes gradually became clear.

"Why are you…" Gu Fuzhou's voice was hoarse from just having woken up. He realized where his hands were and his eyes widened suddenly. His fingers even

curled up and it seemed as though he didn't know where to put them. "What are you doing in my bed?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "What do you think?"

"Did I force you in bed with me?" Gu Fuzhou was horribly shocked, "I never knew I had it in me!"

Lin Qingyu snorted, "Oh, just you?" He gathered up his strength and brought his fist down on Gu Fuzhou's arm. "Now, get up and let go of my hair."

Gu Fuzhou shifted his position and Lin Qingyu was finally freed. He sat up and said, "Since you're awake then get up."

Gu Fuzhou thought back to what had happened last night. All he could remember was pushing open the door, so filled with anticipation, only to see the great beauty without his bridal veil on. His blood pressure immediately

shot through the roof. After that, he had no memory of what happened. He must have passed out.

He hadn't forced Lin Qingyu to bed. So, Lin Qingyu had willingly slept in the same bed? Such a good thing actually exists?

Damn, how could he have fallen asleep last night? At his age, with a beauty lying beside him — Oh, how could he have fallen asleep!

Lin Qingyu watched as Gu Fuzhou remained motionless. He asked, "You're not going to get up?"

Gu Fuzhou gradually got over his shock and said slowly, "Why are you up so early? You don't even have to serve tea to your in-laws."

Lin Qingyu said, "Get up and let's have our morning meal."

"We can sleep for a while longer and just have the noontime meal when it's time." Gu Fuzhou laughed under the quilt, "Qingyu, this is the first time we've slept together, let's sleep a little longer."

Lin Qingyu wasn't in the habit of lazing about in bed but after seeing Gu Fuzhou's expectant eyes, he nevertheless decided to lay back down. He gathered his long hair to one side, making sure that Gu Fuzhou wouldn't be

able to pin it down. The two of them lay face to face like this, making small talk.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Among the guests yesterday, were there any civil servants?”

Gu Fuzhou absentmindedly said, “There were a few; not all civil servants are stupid c*nts – Xiao Jie also came and brought a lot of generous gifts. Hmmm,

this is a certainly way to make money. Qingyu, marry me a few more times and we'll quickly become the richest men in the capital."

Lin Qingyu wasn't in the mood to pay attention to Gu Fuzhou's nonsense. He focused on something useful and asked, "How's your current relationship with Xiao Jie?"

"He admires me a lot. He even said that he wanted to try holding the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear with his own hands."

Only then did Lin Qingyu realize that despite Gu Fuzhou being in the capital for so long already, he had yet to see the legendary spear. "Are you keeping the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear in the training grounds?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "It's a gift from the royal family. Of course, I keep it in my room to show it the proper respect."

"In your own room?" Lin Qingyu looked around, "Where is it?"

Gu Fuzhou pointed lazily at the corner. "It's there."

He saw something like a pole standing in the corner of the room. At first

glance, it looked like an iron rod with red silk tied on it.

Gu Fuzhou said added, “It makes for a good clothes hanger.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

Having lain down for a long time, Lin Qingyu wanted to change positions. When he raised his hand, he inadvertently bumped into something. He couldn’t help suddenly freezing and he quickly retracted his hand.

A certain someone seemed so calm, talking and laughing with him while lying in the bed. But, in truth, they were actually… so energetic?

Gu Fuzhou was also momentarily stunned and the atmosphere suddenly became a little strange.

After a brief silence, Gu Fuzhou said, “What’s with your reaction?” Gu Fuzhou teased, “Do you think you’ll ruin your hand?”

Ruin your hand’ — it made Lin Qingyu inexplicably want to laugh. “I don’t think so.”

“You weren’t like this before. The old you—” Gu Fuzhou began to once again imitate the way he talked. Because the two of them were so familiar with each other, his imitation of Lin Qingyu was a lot better than his imitation of Xiao

Cheng. “As a student of medicine, there is nothing I have not seen before. There is no need for you to make such a fuss.”

Gu Fuzhou had done such a good imitation; Lin Qingyu could not refute it at all. He was indeed knowledgeable and experienced. For him, this thing was nothing more than a piece of flesh. When Lu Wancheng was wilted before, he could even calmly offer to help him check. He himself didn’t know why he reacted that way just now.

After some thought, Lin Qingyu said, “It might be because you are using General Gu’s body now.”

“What does that have to do with it?”

“I have admired General Gu for a long time and I don’t want to disrespect him.”

Gu Fuzhou snorted coldly and said, “Come off it. You’ve even gotten in bed already. Are you telling me now it doesn’t suit my current body?”

Lin Qingyu was speechless. Deciding to simply smash a cracked pot, he said, “Yes, I do think it would ruin my hand.”

Gu Fuzhou applauded and said with a smile, “Nice, as expected of Doctor Lin.”

Thereupon, for the entire rest of the day, whenever Gu Fuzhou saw Lin Qingyu, he would grab his hand, look it all over and say, “Why does Doctor

Lin's hand still look fine? When will it start to get all wrinkle-y…? "

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but wonder whether it was the right decision to marry Gu Fuzhou for the second time. That night, he ordered people to transfer the bunk bed from his Lin Residence into the bridal chamber.

For three days following the wedding, Gu Fuzhou was not required to attend court. While Lin Qingyu was ordering the servants to put away the things he'd brought, Gu Fuzhou was by his side, idling about.

He saw a locked wooden box and asked casually, "What's inside?"

Lin Qingyu glanced at him and then waved the servants away. He opened the wooden box and said, "It's General Gu's memorial tablet. Is there a hidden room in this mansion?"

"I'll ask Yuan Yin to find a room for you later — Looks like there's two tablets. Whose is the other one?"

Lin Qingyu's tone turned subtle. "You can pick it up and take a look."

Gu Fuzhou took out the two tablets. One was indeed General Gu's tablet and the other was…

Gu Fuzhou almost threw what was in his hand. "What is this! Who is Jiang

Dazhuang?"

Lin Qingyu said without batting an eyelash, "Back then, whether you managed to survive or not was unknown. I decided to have a memorial tablet made for you. If you had really died, without a memorial tablet, you wouldn't even be able to enjoy the incense offerings of future generations."

"I understand your good intentions," Gu Fuzhou's expression was complicated, "but why did you think this is my name?"

Lin Qingyu gave a half-smile. "You told me so yourself. At first, you said your name was Zhu Dazhuang and then you changed your name to Jiang, so it was naturally it must be 'Jiang Dazhuang'."

Gu Fuzhou laughed and said, "You know I was joking. Why did you take it seriously?"

With a "bang", Lin Qingyu suddenly closed the lid of the wooden box. "If I didn't take it to be true, then what should I have done? I don't know your name at all." Lin Qingyu's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "I asked you, but you didn't tell me."

Gu Fuzhou frowned, expression turning serious, "When did you ask me?"

Knowing clearly that it was just his own dream, saying it out loud felt unreasonable. But Lin Qingyu still couldn't help but accuse him, "On the seventh day after your death, I asked you, I asked you so many times — I

chased after you, asking you; but you still walked away without even looking back."

Gu Fuzhou murmured, "Wasn't that a dream…F*ck, is it possible to connect using dreams?"

Lin Qingyu's eyes narrowed. "What do you mean?"

Lin Qingyu sat at the table and watched as Gu Fuzhou drag a stool to his side. Even though both of them were sitting, Gu Fuzhou was still a lot taller than

him. When talking to him, he had to bend down and bow his head. “I’m sorry, Qingyu. I didn’t know if I could survive.”

Lin Qingyu said in surprise, “You… know of that dream?”

Gu Fuzhou nodded. “After I had that dream, I woke up in General Gu’s body.”

Lin Qingyu stood up abruptly. “So that was really you? You really didn’t want to tell me your name…”

“If I died, I just thought it would be easier for you to forget about me if you didn’t know my name.”

Lin Qingyu gritted his teeth and said, “You know I have a highly retentive memory. I couldn’t even forget the rooster that took your place at our wedding! What made you think I could forget you?”

Gu Fuzhou chuckled lightly. “I was wrong.” Gu Fuzhou took his hand. One standing, the other sitting, it was now him looking down at Gu Fuzhou. Gu

Fuzhou looked up at him and said, “I’ll tell you now, okay? My name sounds nice.”

“I don’t want to know anymore.” Lin Qingyu turned his head away from looking at him and said calmly, “I don’t care what your name is, it has nothing to do with me.”

Gu Fuzhou, making a big show of being earnest, said, “It’s over, it’s over. This seems to be the angriest Doctor Lin has been since our reunion. He’s even angrier than when he wasn’t sure whether Shen Huaishi had missed or gone soft-hearted.”

Lin Qingyu was indeed angry. When he thought of how upset he’d felt, like he’d lost, when he woke up from the dream, he wanted to strangle Gu Fuzhou to death.

“Letting you touch my abs isn’t enough to coax you anymore so how about I let you rub your face against it?”

He was already so angry but this man was still in the mood to joke?

Lin Qingyu was completely expressionless. “Forget it, I’m afraid of ruining my face.”

Chapter 67

After Lin Qingyu's remarriage, Huan Tong and Hua Lu also came to the General's Mansion. Both of them had a very tangled feelings towards Gu Fuzhou.

Huan Tong was still fine; he was Lin Qingyu's person after all. No matter what Lin Qingyu wanted to do, he would support it wholeheartedly. Although he too felt a little pity for Young Master Hou, the general was simply too heroic. Take for example yesterday; the general had angered the Young Master for some reason and in order to amuse the Young Master, the general went to the training grounds and put on a show for him, breaking slabs of stone on his chest. Were it Young Master Hou, would he have been able to do something like that? Forget breaking those slabs, even just having those slabs press against Young Master Hou's stomach and within half an hour, he would have died.

Man seeks his way up just as water seeks its way down. If his family's Young Master wanted to remarry, he had to marry someone who was more powerful. There was nothing wrong with that.

There was no need to speak of Hua Lu. She was Lu Wancheng's closest maid. When Lu Wancheng was still alive, he treated her like a younger sister. The reason why she was willing to follow Lin Qingyu was because of her respect and love for Lin Qingyu, but even more than that, it was because of Young Master Hou. She knew that the one Young Master Huo had been most

concerned about, the one he had worried about most was Lin Qingyu. And so she wanted to stand in for Young Master Hou and stay by Lin Qingyu's side to look after him.

However, Lin Qingyu seemed to have completely forgotten about Young Master Hou. He and General Gu were newlyweds and they were stuck together all the time. They even had the bunkbed specially designed by Young Master Hou moved into the bridal chamber. If Young Master Hou, out there in the afterlife, knew of this, oh how sad he would be. While it was true that she admired the general, if she were made to choose, she would definitely stand with Young Master Hou.

Hua Lu was someone of no sophistication; her thoughts were writ all over her face. Her eyes, whenever she looked at Gu Fuzhou were always filled with a bit of resentment. Gu Fuzhou could guess what she was thinking; she was ready to make some trouble.

The end of the year was approaching, it was getting colder and colder. Although it had yet to snow, the wind was already bitingly-cold, like a knife cutting against one's face. Who knew what had gotten into Gu Fuzhou, instead of staying in a nice warm room, he insisted on taking Lin Qingyu to the yard for dinner.

Gu Fuzhou ordered someone to bring out a stove, with charcoal burning underneath and a large washed stone covering the top. When the stone turned hot, Gu Fuzhou brushed a layer of oil on it and placed the meats finely cut by

the cook on it to grill. The hot oil lowed along the grains of the meat, it made a sizzling sound, tempting people's fingers into twitching.

Lin Qingyu saw it as a novelty, it was the first time he had seen this way of eating. Gu Fuzhou grilled a few pieces of mutton first, then put it into Lin Qingyu's bowl. "Qingyu, try it."

Lin Qingyu took a small bite and said reservedly, "They only thing I can say is that it's normal. The mutton taste is very strong."

"Don't you eat mutton for the mutton flavor?" Gu Fuzhou picked up a piece that was lined with both lean and fat. "Try this one. Open your mouth."

After hesitating for a while, Lin Qingyu opened his mouth and allowed Gu Fuzhou to put it into his mouth. Looking from out the corner of his eye, Gu Fuzhou saw Hua Lu, who was sitting to one side, and the aggrieved look in her eyes. He raised his voice and asked, "Qingyu, did you even have barbecue with your former husband?"

Lin Qingyu: "…" What was wrong with this person?

Gu Fuzhou rubbed his chin and said, "This general has heard that Young Master Hou was so weak that he had to use a wheelchair wherever he went

and he couldn't eat these greasy things. What kind of fun could you have had with him before?"

"What the general said is correct." Lin Qingyu said coolly, "I can only say that it is fortunate that Young Master Hou died early."

Hua Lu stared at Lin Qingyu in disbelief— Y-Young Master, how can you say such a thing!

Gu Fuzhou asked again, "Then who do you like more, Young Master Hou or this general?"

Lin Qingyu rolled his eyes. "Have you nothing better to talk about?"

A great beauty rolling his eyes can also be pleasing to the eyes. Gu Fuzhou said with a smile, "You can tell me the truth. This general isn't going to drink the vinegar of a dead man."

Seeing that Hua Lu was almost to the point of tears, Lin Qingyu said, "Then I prefer Young Master Hou."

Hua Lu was moved. "Young Master…"

Gu Fuzhou put on an expression of surprise and disappointment; all the while not forgetting to continue feeding Lin Qingyu. "How could this be? Has this

general done anything that isn't to his wife's liking?"

Lin Qingyu's lips curved into a smile. "Young Master Hou is younger and more beautiful than the general. I like them young and beautiful; is there anything wrong with that?"

Gu Fuzhou: "…"

Lin Qingyu saw that the beef that Gu Fuzhou gave him was still red and said, "This is not cooked yet."

Gu Fuzhou told him, "Beef is delicious when it's medium rare."

Lin Qingyu threw the "medium-rare" beef into Gu Fuzhou's bowl with disgust. "Then why didn't you just let it bask in the sun instead? It will taste better if it's cooked."

Lin Qingyu's "I like them young and beautiful" kept Gu Fuzhou from sleeping that night. Lin Qingyu slept on the bottom bunk and from time to time he could hear him turning over, making him unable to sleep. "Aren't you the type

to fall asleep as soon as your head touches the pillow?" Lin Qingyu asked, "What's the matter today?"

Gu Fuzhou rolled down from the bed, sat down beside Lin Qingyu and asked worriedly, "Qingyu, do you really like Lu Wancheng's body more?"

So it was for this matter.

Both Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou were first-class handsome men but they were handsome in different ways. Lu Wancheng was noble while Gu Fuzhou was heroic. Either one was very pleasing to the eyes. But if he were to choose, he still preferred Gu Fuzhou's current body. Being healthy, free from illness and diseases, was more important than anything else.

Lin Qingyu could see that Gu Fuzhou really worried about this issue, so he stopped teasing and told him the truth, "In terms of outward appearance, Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou each have their own advantages. Inwardly, they are all you. As long as it is you, it makes no difference to me."

A smile slowly appeared on Gu Fuzhou's face. It was windy at night, and he was only wearing pajamas, so it was inevitable that he was a little cold. Gu Fuzhou put his hand into Lin Qingyu's quilt. Lying on the edge of the bed, he said, "You said it so nicely but if I had transferred to someone his time, you definitely wouldn't let me put my hand into your quilt."

Lin Qingyu couldn't deny, "That's true, I would have chopped them off for you." Although he wouldn't go so far as to solely judge someone by their

appearance, a marriage would mean that husband and wife would have to look at each every day. If it were someone too ugly, it would inevitably influence his feelings.

Gu Fuzhou's hands gradually began to misbehave but no amount of misbehaving allowed him to go past a bottom line. The farthest he went was secretly pinching Lin Qingyu's waist. However, there was absolute no excess fat to pinch. "The author of "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch" has certified that

you to be the most beautiful in the entire book. There is no one whose appearance could ever take your breath away.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, “But there is someone whose appearance has taken my breath away.”

“Really?” Gu Fuzhou was doubtful. “Whose?”

Lin Qingyu looked at him. “Really.”

Gu Fuzhou said unhappily, “What does he look like?”

“…I’ve forgotten.” As soon as he woke up from that dream, he forgot. That breathless kind of feeling was the only thing he remembered.

“Someone good-looking enough to stun even you; how could you forget? And you have such a good memory too.”

“I don’t know.” Thinking of that dream, Lin Qingyu didn’t want to give Gu Fuzhou something to brag about. The threw Gu Fuzhou’s hand from out his quilt and said, “Now, shoo and go to sleep.”

On the third day after the wedding, the two returned to the Lin Residence. The return ceremony had been prepared by Yuan Yin and having received Gu Fuzhou’s instructions, the gifts he brought back were twice as many as when

he'd gone back the first time. The Lin Residence's warehouse was so full that they had no choice but to empty out several more rooms to hold all the gifts.

Gu Fuzhou and Lin Qingyu once again served tea to his parents. Afterwards, Gu Fuzhou took out a gift for Lin Qinghe – a saber that he used when he was young. It was just right for Lin Qinghe to use at his age. Lin Qinghe accepted his gift and said in a prim and proper voice, "Thank you, General."

Lin Qinghe had been taught very well by his parents and elder brother. In front of outsiders, he carried himself like the young son of a noble family. He only acted like a spoiled child in front of his family. When Gu Fuzhou was still Lu Wancheng, he was one of the targets of his spoiled antics. Seeing Lin

Qinghe treating like such an outsider, he couldn't help but say, "Qinghe, how did you call Young Master Hou before?"

Thinking of Lu Wancheng, Lin Qinghe pursed his lips and said sadly, "I call him 'Wancheng Gege'."

"Then you can call me the same way too."

Lin Qinghe secretly glanced at his brother and seeing him nod, said, "Alright, Uncle Gu."

Gu Fuzhou's face cracked.

Mother Lin hurriedly said: "Qinghe, don't call him that. You've messed up your seniorities."

Lin Qingyu, taking pleasure over the other's misfortune, said, "The general is more than 20 years older than Qinghe, asking him to call the general 'Gege' would be forcing him to do the impossible."

After returning from Lin Residence, Gu Fuzhou fell into a depressed mood. He wasn't depressed at being called 'uncle'. Rather, it was because his three-day marriage leave was over and tomorrow he had to get up early to go to court once again.

There was one person in the General's Mansion who was even more depressed than Gu Fuzhou and that was Yuan Yin. Yuan Yin found Lin Qingyu and said

with a wry smile, “I will have to ask the madam to wake up the general tomorrow.”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Alright, do not worry.”

Yuan Yin could not not worry and he said a few more words, “Having just been married, I’m afraid the madam might not know. Since the general returned from Yongliang, he seems to be suffering from hypersomnia. No matter how much I call to him, he will not wake up. I humbly request the madam to start waking the general half an hour in advance to give the general some extra time.”

Lin Qingyu gave him a meaning-laden smile, “It may be that I have more experience than you in getting him up.”

Yuan Yin was greatly shocked. He also didn’t dare to ask any more questions. He said with an appeasing smile, “Then I will have to trouble the madam.”

Morning court at the Dayu’s was set at Mao Shi and officials would usually get up at the fifth watch. When the time came, Lin Qingyu finished washing and

dressing then went to wake Gu Fuzhou by one again pinching his nose shut. “General, it’s time to go to court.”

Gu Fuzhou held painfully onto the quilt. “I don’t want to go to court. Qingyu, I don’t want to go to court.””What’s the use of telling me?”

Gu Fuzhou closed his eyes. “I’ve decided, I’m going to take a leave of absence — or, better yet, I’ll just simply go back to being a civilian.”

Lin Qingyu ignored him, quickly and ruthlessly pulling off his quilt. He then summoned the servants to wait upon Gu Fuzhou to wash up.

Gu Fuzhou’s was irritable in the mornings and his face was frighteningly gloomy. The sternness of his expression had great terrorizing power and it dettered people from approaching. Lin Qingyu asked the maid serving him to dress to withdraw; taking her place to personally help Gu Fuzhou into his official uniform.

Gu Fuzhou looked down at Lin Qingyu who was earnestly fastening his belt. The greater part of his irritability vanished. He asked, “Qingyu, will you see me off to court?”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes and glanced at him. “How old are you that you still need someone to send you to court?”

Gu Fuzhou didn’t feel the least bit of shame. “I heard from Wu Zhan that every time he leaves his house, his wife send him off and every time he comes back,

he can even enjoy her home cooked soup — I'm really envious. Of course, I can't bear thinking of you making soup. After all, Doctor Lin's hands are made for handling greater things."

Gu Fuzhou babbled on and on. Lin Qingyu picked up his official's cap. When he tried to put it on him, he found that he couldn't reach Gu Fuzhou's head. He said, "Bow your head."

Gu Fuzhou bent down so that Lin Qingyu could help him put it on.

Lin Qingyu looked at Gu Fuzhou and said, "I'll send the general to court."

Gu Fuzhou was momentarily stunned. He then smiled and said, "I was joking. It's cold outside. Just stay at home and wait for me to come back."

"Don't talk nonsense." Lin Qingyu put on a snow-white fox fur robe. "Let's go."

Gu Fuzhou chuckled to himself and followed after Lin Qingyu. He said, "Qingyu, do you know how we say 'don't talk nonsense' in my hometown?"

"How?"

"Stop it with your BB."

"I'll keep that in mind." Lin Qingyu said, "But, don't you hate it when I speak in

your hometown dialect?"

Gu Fuzhou heaved a sighed. "Sigh, you've already learned it so you might as well learn more. If you maange to go to my hometown someday, you'll be able to freely communicate with my fellow townsmen."

Lin Qingyu only saw him off at the gate of the General's Mansion. He watched Gu Fuzhou leave in the carriage, then said to Hua Lu behind him, "Hua Lu, do you now understand?"

Hua Lu didn't understand at all. She shook her head blankly, "Young Master, what is it that I'm supposed to understand?"

Lin Qingyu sneered, "In the future, never marry a younger bag of lazybones. Otherwise, you may have to send him off to court in the cold of early morning."

Hua Lu understood but also didn't. – Just where was this bag of lazybones who was younger than the Young Master?

The author has something to say: I'm ready to go to the plot, do you like this kind of daily life~ Can the extras be all such daily life~

Chapter 68

In morning court, all the ministers were discussing the war between the Dayu and Xixia. Xixia had launched a comeback and they've even changed their chief commander. The way their army marched was completely different from before. Zhao Mingwei could not find any clue how to counter. After three consecutive small defeats, he adopted a conservative strategy, falling back to defend the city, avoided leaving. He was now asking the capital for help. In his letter, Zhao Mingwei repeatedly emphasized that he was not qualified to be the head general and he asked His Majesty to send General Gu take over command as soon as possible.

The emperor, atop his throne, looked down at his ministers. Xiao Cheng stood at the head of this group of ministers. Nowadays, the Imperial Family's father and son looked quite similar — both had sickly complexions, they were thin and haggard. The emperor put his hand on his forehead, his brows furrowed. The ministers' petitions were incessant, assaulting in his ears; mixed with Xiao Cheng's muffled coughs from time to time, it gave him a splitting headache.

Xiao Cheng too was expending all his willpower to attend court. Shen Huaishi's sword had injured his left lung. Not unless some miracle-working

doctor were to suddenly appear, he would not be able to live out his life like a normal person.

Another person expending all his willpower to attend court was Gu Fuzhou. He stood ramrod straight, his eyes lowered. People who saw him thought he was deep in contemplation.

“General Gu and Young Master Lin had only just gotten married. Are we to drive him back to the battlefield? Their marriage bed had yet to even warm.” The one who spoke was General Wu, Wu Zhan, who was good friends with Gu Fuzhou.

The prime minister stroked his beard and said, “General Wu’s words are wrong. Only when one has a country, can one have a family. Faced with this national crisis, does General Gu intend to abandon the 300,000-strong army in the Northwest because of his reluctance to leave a land of warmth and tenderness?”

Wu Zhan, grumbled and swore, “What national crisis? Minister Cui exaggerates the situation! Aren’t these just but a few Xixia bandits?” Wu Zhan stepped forward and knelt down, “Your Majesty, you give me ten thousand

elite soldiers and I will go to the Northwest to support General Zhao immediately. Within three months, I shall bring to the Dayu a great victory!"

The prime minister shook his head and said, "You speak conceited nonsense, overestimating your own abilities."

Wu Zhan said, brimming with anger, "I overestimate my abilities? Then you go do it!"

The emperor listened to the two arguing, saying nothing, moving not an inch and without even any change in his expression. Suddenly, he said, "Crown Prince, what do you think of this matter?"

Xiao Cheng seemed not to have heard. His expression remained unchanged, his thoughts obviously straying from the present.

The emperor called out sharply, "Crown Prince!"

Xiao Cheng finally came back to his senses and said, "Your humble son agrees."

"You agree? And whose proposal are you agreeing to?"

"Of course to Minister Cui's." Xiao Cheng coughed again. "Your humble son is unwell and has been discourteous before the court. I hope my Imperial Father may forgive me."

In consideration for Xiao Cheng's condition, the emperor held back his anger.

He then asked Gu Fuzhou, “Gu Aiqing, what do you think?”

Gu Fuzhou: “…”

After being ignored twice in a row, the emperor couldn’t bear it any longer. He slammed his hand on the table and shouted angrily, “Gu Fuzhou!”

Gu Fuzhou opened his eyes; there was a lightning-quick flash of confusion in his eyes. When he saw Wu Zhan kneeling in front of the emperor, his posture that of requesting the emperor to allow him to be dispatched, Gu Fuzhou could already make a guess what the emperor was asking. “Though General Wu is a talented and outstanding leader of troops, his talents lay not in formulating overall tactics. I think he is more suitable to leading the vanguard.”

Wu Zhan kept throwing pointed looks at Gu Fuzhou, but Gu Fuzhou just pretended not to see them. “Moreover, the terrain in the Northwest is mostly plains and deserts. General Wu’s expertise lay in naval battles. Sending him to the Northwest would not be suitable.”

Gu Fuzhou’s words were reasonable and well-founded and the emperor could not find any fault. He had no choice but to adjust his tone and say, “Gu Aiqing’s words are reasonable. Wu Zhan is indeed not suitable for command of the Northwest.”

The prime minister took the opportunity to say, “General Gu has been stationed in the Northwest for many years. No one knows how to march in

those plains and deserts better than the general. There is no one more suitable than General Gu to command in the Northwest."

The Minister of War agreed. "The General's secret return to the capital was to dispel the Sky Spider Poison. Now, the poison has been resolved and the general has also been married with great fanfare, the matter of the general's return to the capital has long ceased to be a secret. Xixia, too, has learned about the head general's absence in Yongliang and they dare to act so recklessly. If the general does not return to stabilize the army's morale, I'm afraid it will only further embolden Xixia."

Gu Fuzhou's brows furrowed. Hand to his chest, he said, "Allow me to lead the troops to battle."

Wu Zhan hurriedly said, "No! Although the Sky Spider Poison has been resolved, the successive poisonings has long damaged the general's body. The doctor said that if the general wishes to live past a few years, he must stay in the capital to recuperate."

The doctor Wu Zhan spoke of was none other than Gu Fuzhou's new wife. A few days ago, Wu Zhan went to the General's Mansion as a guest and General Gu, without bothering with trifles, asked his new wife to drink at the same

table. It was then that the general's wife revealed about the general's condition to him.

Gu Fuzhou said solemnly, "Before the needs of the nation, I wish to place the matter of my life and death aside."

"How could this possibly be! The general's very life and death is a matter that concerns the nation. If he were forced to return to the Northwest at this time, causing a relapse, would this not be even more to the liking of those Xixia thieves!"

The emperor's headache was getting unbearable. He had been expecting Xiao Cheng to step up and preside over the overall situation. But apart from reply to him, Xiao Cheng had not said a work. Who know what he was thinking?

He had high such hopes for the crown prince. How did things turn out like this?

The matter of the head general will be set aside from later discussion. For now, come up with a temporary plan to provide Zhao Mingwei a plan for action. — This session of the morning court is done." The emperor, physically and mentally exhausted, got to his feet and was immediately staggered, feeling dizzy. All the ministers got to their knees. "We ask the Emperor to look after his health."

After the ministers were dismissed, Gu Fuzhou and Wu Zhan walked out together. Wu Zhan asked him, "General, why won't you let me go to the

Northwest?"

Gu Fuzhou said, "You are fundamentally ill-suited for battle in the Northwest." Having him go would only be giving the enemy another head. It was unnecessary.

"But if I don't go, the general will have to go." Wu Zhan joked, "Could it be that the general is willing to leave his new wife to spend several years in the desolate Northwest?"

"Naturally, I am most unwilling." Gu Fuzhou said, eloquent and rousing, "A man of character aspires to travel far and make one's mark. How could one be confined to but one place in the universe for love?"

Wu Zhan was immediately filled with deep veneration. "The general is truly a role model for my generation!"

After separating from Wu Zhan, Gu Fuzhou saw a eunuch carrying a vase heading in his direction. The vase was half as high a person. Carrying it, it was impossible to see the path ahead.

The eunuch who was guiding Gu Fuzhou out was afraid that this person would block General Gu's way and so he said, "Xiao Songzi, you have to slow down."

"Xiao Songzi?" Gu Fuzhou asked, "Could this be Xiao Songzi of Qinzheng

Hall?"

With much difficulty, Xiao Songzi managed to stick his head out from behind the vase. Seeing Gu Fuzhou, he hurriedly said, "Replying to the general, this is indeed on duty at Qinzheng Hall."

The corners of Gu Fuzhou's lips ticked up slightly. "I have long looked forward to meeting you."

Xiao Songzi was overwhelmed by the unexpected favor. What virtue could a eunuch like himself have that the general would anticipate making his

acquaintance. “The general jests. It is this servant who has long wished for the honor of meeting the mighty general.”

“You are being humble.” Gu Fuzhou turned to the eunuch who was leading the way for him, “Please allow Xiao Songzi to be the one to see me out.”

The eunuch who led the way took the vase from Xiao Songzi and stepped back. Gu Fuzhou said, “I’ve heard the Madam mention you.”

Xiao Songzi said, “Doctor Lin… I mean, the general’s wife, used to treat us servants.”

Gu Fuzhou nodded lightly and asked, “Did the Emperor’s headaches no already get better? Why is his complexion so terribly today?”

Xiao Songzi, worthy of his name Xiao Songzi, said without any hesitation, “Replying to the general, the Emperor was indeed much better before. But when the winter came, the headaches suddenly intensified once again. Medicine and acupuncture proved no use. Even Lin Pan Yuan is at a loss.”

Gu Fuzhou returned to the General’s Mansion. Before he could even ask, Yuan Yin said, “The Madam should be in the study now.”

Gu Fuzhou handed his official’s hat to Yuan Yin and headed straight for the study. The door of the study was open. Pushing aside the wind-blocking curtain, he saw Lin Qingyu dressed in white, sitting by the window, studying a game of chess. He held a chess manual in one hand, while the fingertip of the

other carelessly rolled a black piece. Though bright and vibrant of face, his temperament was as cold as the moon, as though he were placed far about the mundanity of the world. Huan Tong was positioned to one side, quietly adding charcoal to the stove.

Damn, please let him be confined evermore to one place for love.

What did a man of character aspiring to travel far and make his mark have anything to do with him? He just wanted to be able to sleep until he wakes up naturally and then stay at home and indulge in the sight of this beauty.

Lin Qingyu was so engrossed in studying the chess match that he didn't notice him entering, until he heard a familiar voice, "Lin Qingyu—"

Lin Qingyu looked up and said, "What's wrong?"

"What do you mean 'what's wrong'?"

"You've never called me Lin Qingyu."

Gu Fuzhou asked deliberately, "Then how do I usually call you?"

"Qingyu or Doctor Lin." Lin Qingyu frowned, "Did something happen?"

"It's nothing," Gu Fuzhou smiled a little wickedly, "Oh, if it isn't Huan Tong. I guess we should keep the lovey-dovey to a minimum. He's not even married

yet; seeing us all close and affection might make him sad."

Huan Tong said, indignantly, "I won't!"

Lin Qingyu said, displeased, "Next time, don't call me by my full name. I'm not used to it."

Gu Fuzhou coughed twice, not wanting to appear too proud of himself. "I'll try my best."

Gu Fuzhou slumped across from Lin Qingyu, picked up a white piece and tossed back and forth. He said, souding offhand, "Qingyu, your marriage leave is probably coming to an end."

Lin Qingyu had mentioned to Gu Fuzhou before that the prescription for the emperor's headache included the wings of a Golden Silkworm Gu. The Golden Silkworm Gu took different forms for each seasons and the preparation of the medicine would also change accordingly. Even his father didn't understand the subtleties of it. As the weather grows colder, the previous prescription would gradually lose effect. If the emperor didn't not want to be tormented by the headaches once again, he was left with no choice but invite Lin Qingyu back.

Lin Qingyu was not at all surprised by this matter. "Is that so?"

Not long after, Hua Lu came to call them to dinner. After dinner, Gu Fuzhou went bitterly to the training grounds to lift weights and Lin Qingyu continued

the unfinished chess game. When the night grew dark, the two returned to their bedroom and went to bed

In the middle of the night, Lin Qingyu was awakened by thirst. He opened his eyes and saw that a light was burning in the room. It was Gu Fuzhou who had lit a lamp, under whose light he wrote and pondered. Lin Qingyu had no idea what he could be writing.

Lin Qingyu had been witness to a lot of times when Gu Fuzhou did not act like his usual self. It was when he saw him occasionally being serious that he would remember that this person was every bit as scheming as he was. Only that most of the time, Lin Qingyu didn't bother to think about it.

Lin Qingyu sat up. Gu Fuzhou heard the movement and turned to look at him. "You're awake?"

"I'm thinking about how Xixia's newly-appointed chief commander uses his troops." Gu Fuzhou looked down at the enemy's marching route that he had

recreated based on his memory and what Zhao Mingwei had written in his report. “It’s kind of interesting.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Why don’t you do this during the day?”

Gu Fuzhou said without hesitation, “Because I want to play during the day.”

Lin Qingyu got out of bed. He put on an outer robe and poured himself a cup of tea. “So, are you worried about the war situation in the Northwest?”

“No, I was just thinking about it casually.” Gu Fuzhou started to write, “If he chooses to strive, let him strive. I choose to lie at home.”

Lin Qingyu, taking precaution, took two steps back. He vigilantly watched the brush in Gu Fuzhou’s hand. Whenever Gu Fuzhou held a brush while lost in thought, he was in danger of being splattered with ink.

Gu Fuzhou paused. “What’s wrong?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Are you trying to dirty me again?”

Gu Fuzhou was momentarily dazed. After confirming his own intentions, he said with a smile, “It’s over. It seems I was thinking about it a bit.”

The author has something to say: The male high school student actually wants to dirty the big beauty. You are no longer innocent!

Chapter 69

Gu Fuzhou really had thought about it. It was unbelievable.

It wasn't that he hadn't thought about such things in his nineteen years of life. Any boy of sound mind and body would have had at least some of those kind of thoughts going through puberty. He was no exception. At the age of thirteen or fourteen, his father solemnly lectured him on physiology and asked him to maintain strict self-discipline and to always show respect for others in this regard.

He remembered how he'd felt after jerking himself off the first time. — That's all? His hand was so sore, it was about to fall off. That's all?

Of course, it felt good, undeniably. But the cost-performance ration wasn't really that high. Although he was lazy, he was quite particular about personal cleanliness. Even if he were just doing it himself, he had to take a shower before and after. The entire process took more than an hour. Wasn't this time better spent sleeping?

Later, when he was sixteen or seventeen, he found that his classmates, especially the boys, seemed to be very interested in this aspect. His brothers often shared with him some decidedly very un-PG rated things. His brothers

would always be flushed with excitement, but he simply felt sorry for the male lead.

After “working” for so long without stopping, after sweating so much, wouldn’t his waist be absolutely sore? It’s so tiring. He already felt tired just watching it.

When he told his brothers how he felt, his brothers were shocked and dubbed him frigid. He disagreed; he wasn’t frigid, he was just too lazy to move. If his future wife was willing to put in the extra effort, he would gladly do it.

In short, because he was too lazy, he lived a life free of worldly desires. Even if he had someone he liked, he didn’t deliberately let his thoughts stray to such things. If you like someone, do you automatically have to have an urge towards him? Do you have to want to sleep with him? Isn’t it okay to just be happy together?

It wasn’t until Lin Qingyu suddenly asked him that that he realized that he did want to sleep with him. Even if he’d be tired half to death he… would probably think it was worth it.

Using the word “sleep” was polite. What he wanted to say something more vulgar. He wanted to dirty Lin Qingyu, leave all kinds of marks on Lin Qingyu’s body, let him be contaminated with his own scent. He even wanted to

say some unsavory “dirty talk” into his ear. If it wasn’t for Lin Qingyu’s use of the word “dirty”, he wouldn’t have realized that he actually had such a fetish.

After understanding his own intentions, Gu Fuzhou suddenly found himself so greasy and wretched— Oh, why did he have such a side to him? If he starts to lust after Lin Qingyu’s body, then what was the difference between him and the likes of the emperor and Xiao Cheng?

Shocked into sitting from his deathbed, he realized, I’m actually the ‘Cao Thief’?

No, no. Lin Qingyu was originally his wife. What was wrong with him lusting after his own wife? Those who lusted after his wife were the Cao Thieves.

But this cold beauty was meant for admiring, not for dallying with.

Oh, but how he wished to dally with him.

Gu Fuzhou, now with his newly discovered worldly desires, couldn’t help but wonder — Lin Qingyu was also a man. Could it be that he also had worldly desires?

Naturally, Lin Qingyu didn’t know what was going on in that strange head of his. He only felt that the other party’s eyes as he looked at him were deep and

dark, no longer as pure as in the past, as though he were now somewhat more mature.

The two went back to bed. Gu Fuzhou had long since seen through all of the enemy's situation and tactics. Eyes open, with his hands behind his head, he said, "Qingyu, you're almost twenty years old."

"En."

"This is the time when you're full of animal spirit. How come I've never seen you… Do you understand what I mean?" Gu Fuzhou felt that he had already

said it very clearly. With Lin Qingyu's intelligence, it was impossible he wouldn't understand.

Lin Qingyu said, "I don't understand."

"Come on, you must understand." Gu Fuzhou teased, "Or do you also have no interest at all in this matter?"

"I certainly do not have any interest. But why would you use 'also'?"

All of Gu Fuzhou's attention was on the first half of Lin Qingyu's statement. "It can't be… you're not lazy. Why aren't you interested at all?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "Probably because I've seen a lot and touched a lot."

He had lost count of how many men's bodies he had seen, of women's bodies as well. He wasn't proficient in gynecology, but dabbled in it regardless. When he had been traveling with his mentor, he had delivered babies for pregnant women.

As far as he could remember, he never seemed to have had any special reaction to touching someone's body. It seemed that only Gu Fuzhou's body had made

him feel that “ruined hand” feel, making him flustered when he touched that key part.

Gu Fuzhou choked and said, “Studying medicine is really scary.”

Gu Fuzhou slept late and getting up the next day was a disaster. Lin Qingyu dragged Gu Fuzhou up from the bed, asked Hua Lu to bring breakfast and watched as he begrudgingly ate his porridge.

“Qingyu, when do I get to rest?”

Officials of the Dayu, except for the New Year, could only rest on the fifteenth day of each month. Lin Qingyu helped him do the math and said, “In ten days.”

Gu Fuzhou’s handsome face twisted. “Ten days? Sa-save me…”

After Gu Fuzhou got dressed, Lin Qingyu was about to send him out of the mansion when he saw Yuan Yin running to report, “General, Madam, there is news from the palace. The Emperor has an unbearable headache and the crown prince’s wound is acting up. There will be no morning court today.”

Gu Fuzhou was stunned by the sudden surprise. Save for the night of their second marriage, Lin Qingyu had never seen him so excited. As soon as Yuan

Yin finished speaking, he disappeared. In the blink of an eye, he reappeared in bed, the quilt swelling once again.

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly. He instructed the servants not to approach the bedroom so as to allow the general to sleep to his heart's content.

Not long after the news of the suspension of morning court, there came another messenger from the palace. The emperor's illness was getting worse by the day and the Imperial Hospital was helpless. The emperor finally couldn't take it anymore and once again summoned Lin Qingyu to the palace.

Lin Qingyu examined the emperor's pulse and adjusted the previous prescription. After drinking it for a few days, the emperor's symptoms lessened in intensity. It stood to reason that Lin Qingyu should be rewarded, but his heart was still full of anger. When he thought of how this gentle and submissive beauty in front of him was already married, of how he, as the emperor, still had someone he couldn't possess, it was inevitable that feelings of unwillingness and resentment would grow in his heart.

Were he but an ordinary courtier's wife, forcibly seizing him would have been of no matter. But he was Gu Fuzhou's wife. A few days later, Gu Fuzhou submitted to him a report. From the deployment of troops and horses to the delivery of food and fodder, he had analyzed the battle situation in the

Northwest in a very thorough manner. After reading it, no matter how unwillingly, the emperor still sent the report to the Northwest.

The emperor refused to restore Lin Qingyu to his official position and Lin Qingyu did not take the initiative to mention it. He merely said that he was unsure about the efficacy of some ingredients and he had to go to the Imperial Medical Office to consult their books. The emperor reinstated Lin Qingyu's right to access the Imperial Medical Office. In addition, Lin Qingyu went to the palace every three days to examine the emperor's pulse. Except for having no official position or salary, it was no different from the past.

Lin Qingyu had never cared about the official position or salary. Marrying Gu Fuzhou was simply a solution out of a desperate situation. If he wanted a safe and secure life with Gu Fuzhou, they still had a lot to do.

Gu Fuzhou waited and waited and waited, finally it his once in a month rest day. Lin Qingyu happened to be scheduled for a visit to the palace that day. When Lin Qingyu got up, he made sure to keep his movements light. Then, thinking about it, it seemed there was no need. Gu Fuzhou wasn't the type to

be woken up with just a bit of noise, after all. Unexpectedly, as soon as his feet landed, he heard a low hoarse voice from the upper bunk. “Qingyu…”

Lin Qingyu was surprised. “Why did you wake up?”

Gu Fuzhou closed his eyes and said weakly, “You’re going to the palace today. I’ll see you off.”

Lin Qingyu was stunned and a warmth that shouldn’t have appeared in winter rose in his heart. He said though, “You’re on the verge of passing out. How could you possibly see me off?”

Gu Fuzhou sat up sleepily, rubbed his eyes and said automatically, “No matter how sleepy I am, I have to see my wife off to work…”

Lin Qingyu said with a smile. “There’s no need. You should go back to sleep.”

Gu Fuzhou forced himself to get out of bed. “No, you see me off every day. If I don’t see you off, I would be absolute scum.”

Gu Fuzhou was so dead set on doing it that Lin Qingyu decided to let him do it. He originally thought that Gu Fuzhou would do the same as he did, simply seeing him off the gate of the General’s Mansion. He didn’t expect that Gu Fuzhou would get in the carriage with him and see him off directly to the gate of the palace. Although Gu Fuzhou had been dozing off against his shoulder in the carriage, not a word exchanged between them, describing this early

morning feeling as so touching as to move even heaven and earth would not be an exaggeration. It truly was precious.

Once in the palace, the eunuch led Lin Qingyu to Qinzheng Hall. When the emperor told him to enter, Master Xie, the leader of the Tianji Camp, was just on his way out. The two passed each other and Lin Qingyu caught a light fragrance.

Lin Qingyu very quickly found out where the fragrance came from. The emperor showed him something – a crystal clear snow lotus. Simply judging from the color of the petals, you could tell it was extraordinary.

The emperor said, "Have a look, this may be good for my headache."

Lin Qingyu took of a whiff of the snow lotus' fragrance and asked, "Dare to ask Your Majesty, is this from the Northern Regions?"

Hearing the "Northern Regions", the emperor seemed uneasy. "They say it was collected from the extreme north of the Northern Regions."

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly and said, "It is indeed a rare and priceless ingredient. This student shall formulate a new prescription for Your Majesty. Using this snow lotus from the north as an ingredient, it will definitely be able to produce twice the result with half the effort."

After taking his leave, Lin Qingyu spent a long time in the library of the Imperial Medical Office before returning to the General's Mansion at dusk. As

soon as he got off the carriage, he saw a luxurious carriage parked in front of the General's Mansion. Such pomp would be overstepping the bounds of propriety for any common official. It was obvious as to who had come.

The carriage arrived but a moment earlier than Lin Qingyu. As soon as the owner of the carriage alighted, he met face-to-face with Lin Qingyu. "—It's that beautiful imperial physician!"

Lin Qingyu said, "I am no longer an imperial physician, Your Highness."

"Then I shall call you Doctor Lin." The person who had come was Xiao Jie, the fourth prince. With him was his steward, ever inseparable from him — surnamed 'Xi' and with a single name 'Rong'.

Lin Qingyu had no interest in pretty idiots. Only smart people held his interest. Compared with Xiao Jie, he paid much more attention to Xi Rong. "We are honored by His Highness' presence but was the general expecting you?"

"No — Ah, what I mean is that he should be. Last time, the general promised to show me his Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear and his Ferghana horse. Today, I happened to be passing by the General's Mansion and suddenly thought of this, so I just…"

Xiao Jie smiled awkwardly. Xi Rong bowed to Lin Qingyu, and said politely, "His Highness, on a whim, came uninvited and disturbed the general and his

wife. If it is inconvenient for the General, next time, we shall send a letter in advance before bringing down His Highness."

Lin Qingyu said, "Today is the General's rest day. There is no inconvenience. Please come in, Your Highness."

Once they entered the mansion, Xiao Jie looked around curiously and asked, "Why do I not see General Gu?"

Lin Qingyu guessed, "At this hour, he should be playing."

Xiao Jie looked completely confused. He raised his head and asked Xi Rong, "Does the General also play?"

Xi Rong said, "General Gu's 'play' may be different from Your Highness's 'play'."

Xiao Jie grinned and said, "I understand. For example, my 'play' is to eat and drink and the General's 'play' is to ride horses and shoot arrows?"

Xi Rong smiled and nodded, "Your Highness is wise."

Lin Qingyu said, "Your Highness, may I ask that you wait in the hall for a while? I will go and invite the General. Huan Tong, kindly serve tea to His Highness."

Xiao Jie took a sip of the tea from the General's Mansion. His eyes lit up and

he was filled with praise. “This is delicious. This might even taste better than the tea in the palace! A’Rong, why don’t you give it a try too?”

Xi Rong shook his head and said, “Your Highness, you mustn’t forget etiquette when you are outside.”

Xiao Jie was a little disappointed. “Alright.”

“Don’t you find it strange, Your Highness?” Xi Rong said, “In terms of etiquette, it would be better for the General’s wife to stay and entertain the guests. Then why did the Madam go to personally call the General? The Madam doesn’t seem like someone who doesn’t understand etiquette.”

Xiao Jie thought for a while, but couldn’t think of a reason. “Why?”

Xi Rong smiled slightly and said, “The Madam probably has something to tell the General in private.”

Lin Qingyu found Gu Fuzhou in the bedroom. Gu Fuzhou had a strip of black cloth tied over his eyes. In front of him was a porcelain bottle that Lin Qingyu

used to hold medicine. A red rope was tied to the mouth of the bottle and the other end of the red rope was tied to the beam of the house.

Hearing Lin Qingyu's footsteps, Gu Fuzhou pulled the black cloth up, revealing smiling eyes. "Qingyu, Qingyu, I'll show you something good."

Saying so, Gu Fuzhou put the black cloth back on. He pushed the porcelain vase hard, and the vase began to sway back and forth. Gu Fuzhou too swayed left and right, perfectly avoiding being hit by the vase every time.

The corners of Gu Fuzhou's lips rose up. "How? I practiced for a whole hour."

Lin Qingyu stepped forward and grabbed the swinging porcelain vase. He said, "Xiao Jie and his eunuch are here."

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows. "Right now?"

"They're already in the mansion."

Gu Fuzhou smelled the familiar light scent and the corners of his lips rose even higher. He stretched out his hand, pretending to grab the porcelain bottle, instead he hugged Lin Qingyu's waist, having achieved what he wished.

Lin Qingyu allowed him to hold him. He stretched out his hand and tore off the black cloth. "Also, Xiao Cheng really did send the Tianji Camp to the

Northern Regions. The Emperor must be quite dissatisfied about this."

Looking at the beauty with a light medicinal fragrance in his arms, Gu Fuzhou, though with a heart like a frisky money and a mind like a cantering horse, was still able to set aside some portion of his brain to think, "Does Doctor Lin mean… today? Isn't it a bit too early?"

Lin Qingyu pushed Gu Fuzhou away and said, "There is no need to say too much. We can just sound him out for now."

The two returned to the front hall to meet their guests together. In front of Xiao Jie and Xi Rong, Gu Fuzhou was deep and reserved, sedate and taciturn. Even Xi Rong could not have imagined that not long ago, General Gu had been

in his room practicing how not to be hit on the head by a swaying porcelain bottle.

After exchanging greetings, Gu Fuzhou ordered someone to present the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear. This spear was so heavy that most people couldn't hold it. It took at least two grown men to lift it.

Xiao Jie circled around the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear a few times, making a few "wow" sounds. He turned his head and said excitedly at Xi Rong. "A'Rong, can you feel the murderous spirits from the Northwest?"

Xi Rong said: "The spear is nourished by blood. The General's spear possess a spiritual quality."

Xiao Jie tried to pick up the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear but no matter how hard he tried, he only managed to barely lift it a fraction using both hands. He couldn't help but sight. "This spear is heavy enough to smash a person to death, but

General Gu is able to wield it one-handed to cut down countless enemies. You are truly worthy of being the greatest warrior of the Dayu."

In the face of the prince's praise, Gu Fuzhou still cherished words like gold, "Your Highness bestows undeserved praise."

Having seen enough of the spear, Gu Fuzhou took them to the stable. A fine steed was drinking water with its head down. Feeling the presence of strangers, the horse raised its neck vigilantly and flicked its tail restlessly.

This horse was as black as ink, with slender limbs and a thick mane, completely different from the ordinary horses seen outside. Only that due to a

long period of inactivity, it was now a lot fatter than when it first arrived in the capital.

Xiao Jie was amazed and asked, “What’s its name?”

Lin Qingyu gave Gu Fuzhou a playful look and said, “Xiao Bai.”

Xiao Jie looked confused. “But, it’s black.”

Gu Fuzhou said solemnly, “Indeed. Your Highness, would you like to try riding it?”

Xiao Jie was both startled and delighted, “Ca-can I?”

Xi Rong disapproved. “A prized horse is spirited and very loyal to its master. And Your Highness isn’t good at riding. I hope Your Highness will reconsider.”

Gu Fuzhou said, “With me here, nothing will happen.”

Xiao Jie stroked Xiao Bai’s inky back and his heart was tempted. “There shouldn’t be any problem if I just ride it for a walk around, right — A’Rong?”

Xi Rong sighed helplessly, cupped his hands in salute and said, “Then, might I trouble the General to stay by his side to look after him?”

Gu Fuzhou took Xiao Jie to ride the horse, while Lin Qingyu and Xi Rong stayed to one side and watched. It was not difficult to see that the relationship

between Xiao Jie and Xi Rong was by no means an ordinary master-servant relationship. Xiao Jie obviously relied heavily on Xi Rong, consistent with what Gu Fuzhou had said. But Lin Qingyu couldn't make out any of Xi Rong's paranoid side. It could be assumed that he was also quite proficient at hiding his true colors.

Lin Qingyu said casually, "His Highness is quite innocent and unaffected. When the Crown Prince ascends the throne, being the idle prince of a fief would be quite good for him."

Xi Rong's eyes dimmed slightly but he also very quickly presented a smile even better than that of a woman's. "What the Madam says is true."

The author has something to say:

Salted Fish : It's not that I can't, I'm really just lazy, believe me =w=

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Chapter 70

Xiao Jie was having a great time and won't be coaxed into leaving for a while. Huan Tong brought over a table, chair and heater. "Young Master, please sit while you wait."

Lin Qingyu instructed, "Bring over another chair for Steward Xi."

"Madam, thank you for your courtesy." Xi Rong said with lowered eyes, "But Xi Rong is but a servant. How could I possibly sit together with the General's wife?"

Lin Qingyu threw out lightly, "His Highness doesn't see Steward Xi as a servant. Steward Xi too should refrain from always labeling himself so."

No matter what Xi Rong thought in his heart, he still maintained a humble expression on his face. "His Highness is of such a temperament that he often

plays with the servants in his palace. While His Highness does not understand the rules, Xi Rong dares not to not understand."

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly, but a bit of coldness in his eyes appeared in his eyes. "It seems that there is no convincing Steward Xi to share with me this cup of tea."

"The Madam is unparalleled in elegance and beauty, it is simply incomparable. How can a lowly person such as this little one have the blessing of drinking with the Madam?"

Lin Qingyu no longer forced him and said dispassionately, "Then, as you wish."

Xi Rong stood behind Lin Qingyu and took measure of this renowned beauty of the capital, revealing none of his feelings or intentions. Lin Qingyu's appearance was impeccable, just by sitting here quietly and sipping tea, he managed to turn this cold training grounds into an elegant and exquisite picture scroll.

However, the more breathtaking the beauty, the more dangerous. Lin Qingyu had first been married to Young Master Hou and then to General Gu. He was once a close minister of the Emperor. Nowadays, though without any official

position, he was free to enter and leave the palace. How could such a person not have schrewdness and cunning.

Lin Qingyu noticed Xi Rong's gaze and said, "Why does Steward Xi look at me instead of keeping his eyes on His Highness?"

Xi Rong was exposed by Lin Qingyu but he still maintained his composure. "This little one is looking at the tea the Madam is holding. Just now, His Highness was full of nothing but praise for your home's tea, saying that it is better than even the tea in the imperial palace. I was wondering if the Madam would be so kind as to allow this little one insight as to secret behind this tea."

Lin Qingyu put down the tea cup and said, "Steward Xi's every thought truly is for the sake of His Highness. In the future, when His Highness goes to preside over his fief, will you also be going with him?"

"This is but natural."

"Are you willing though?"

Xi Rong's long and narrow phoenix eyes narrowed, aghast. "This little one simply does not understand what the Madam means."

Lin Qingyu caught the slight change on Xi Rong's face and the corners of his mouth pulled up, intrigued. "If you stay in the capital, stay in the palace, Steward Xi may yet be the Imperial Supervisor, Court Eunuch of the Seal; but

once you go with His Highness to his fief, you can only be a castrated steward forever."

The word "castrated" pierced right into Xi Rong's marrow. But as he has been stabbed a lot, he was capable of keep his balance no matter when and where: "Court Eunuch of the Seal… Madam should know what these words mean."

"The Imperial Supervisor, Court Eunuch of the Seal is also known as the 'internal prime minister'. He is the head of the inner court. This is the meaning that you speak of."

Xi Rong lowered his face. He was inherently gentle-looking and reserved, paired with a somber expression, Huan Tong, watching from the side, felt chills down his spine. "Does the General's wife not fear that this little one might misunderstand his words?"

Lin Qingyu asked back, "Then, did you misunderstand?"

When speaking to a wise man, one need only touch upon a topic obliquely. Xi Rong obviously understood what he meant but he remained silent, feigning ignorance.

His reaction was just as Lin Qingyu expected. Although Gu Fuzhou and Xiao Jie had some friendship, it was more accurate to call it a passing acquaintance. Xi Rong had only met him twice. Just as Gu Fuzhou had said, to plan together a conspiracy right now, was much too early. Lin Qingyu saying all these was

just a way to sound him out and Xi Rong's silence had already given him the answer.

Since Xi Rong didn't trust him, he'll let him taste some sweetness first.

"Speaking of which, His Highness has already moved out of the palace and established his own mansion, and yet he is still only the 'fourth prince'. I remember that when the Emperor had been crown prince, several of his brothers were thereupon conferred the title of feudal kings. When the Emperor ascended to the throne, these kings went on to oversee their own fiefs." Lin Qingyu said, "His Majesty attends to countless state affairs. Moreover, he is currently ill. I am afraid that he might have forgotten this matter. It would be ideal if someone were to remind him of this."

Xiao Jie's biological mother had been nothing more than a maid from a provincial palace. She had given birth to Xiao Jie after having been favored by the Emperor for a single night. The Emperor was not very fond of this son and Xiao Jie had not even a shred of talent for civil or military affairs. The Emperor rarely ever thought of this son of his. Ordinary ministers would not be so senseless as to remind the Emperor of this matter of his title lest they incur the Crown Prince's displeasure; if that were to be the case, the gains would not make up for the losses. As a result, the matter of Xiao Jie's title as feudal king has been delayed until now and it has been weighing heavily on Xi Rong's mind.

Xi Rong also wanted to use this matter to see how capable the General and his wife were. And so, he smiled and said, "I also hope that His Highness may be

conferred his title as king as soon as possible." After giving a positive response, he added, "It would be good to leave the capital, this place rife with trouble, as soon as possible."

While the two were talking, Xiao Jie had already taken a stroll around and returned with Gu Fuzhou. Lin Qingyu handed Gu Fuzhou the tea he had prepared in advance. "General, please have a drink."

Gu Fuzhou smiled. "Thank you, Madam."

Meanwhile, Xiao Jie was animatedly sharing with Xi Rong the feeling of riding the Ferghana horse. "Xiao Bai might look fierce but in front of General Gu, he is very well-behaved. He goes wherever the General wills him to go. If the General wants him to go fast, he goes fast and if the General wants him to go slow, he goes slow."

Xi Rong said, "It seems even a normal horse can do that."

"It's different." Xiao Jie waved his hand and explained earnestly, "Obviously I can feel the difference. Alas, I don't know how to describe it…"

Xi Rong said with a smile, "We've now seen both horse and spear. It is getting late. It would be best that His Highness returns home."

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou saw the both of them off. Xiao Jie got into the carriage first and Xi Rong once again apologized to them for dropping in

unannounced. He thanked them for their thoughtful hospitality and then finally said, “Then I shall be taking my leave first.”

“Wait a minute.” Lin Qingyu stopped him, “I’ll write down the secret behind the tea and give it to Steward Xi next time. Will that do?”

Xi Rong bowed, his hands cupped before his chest. He said, “I thank the Madam for your trouble.”

As soon as the carriage left, Gu Fuzhou rubbed his face and complained, “Why is pretending to have facial paralysis so tiring?”

Lin Qingyu turned around and went back in to the mansion. “What’s the matter? You’re the one who chose to do it.”

“I’m going to sleep.” Gu Fuzhou followed after Lin Qingyu. Ever so casually, he put his hand on the other’s shoulder. “How was your talk with Xi Rong?”

“You’re right. He’s an ambitious man.”

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “How could I be wrong? I’ve read the entire book.”

“Amazing, so amazing.” Lin Qingyu gave perfunctory praise. “Moreover, he must mind his physical deficiency very much. I can understand. Having the person he likes smile so innocently in front of him all the time while he can

only look on helplessly as he gets married and fathers children. If it were me…"

"Wait." Gu Fuzhou frowned, "The person he likes? Who are you talking about?"

"Xiao Jie, of course."

Gu Fuzhou was shocked. "Why would you think that Xi Rong likes Xiao Jie?"

Lin Qingyu was bewildered. "Didn't you write it? Xiao Cheng and Shen Huaishi, Xiao Jie and Xi Rong."

"I also wrote down Xiao Li and the Empress. You can't possibly think there's anything going on between this pair of mother and son, right?" Gu Fuzhou tutted, "You don't look it, Doctor Lin. I never took you to be so accepting. I am ashamed of my inferiority. Oh, for shame!"

Lin Qingyu found himself in a rare moment of dumfounded-ness. Gu Fuzhou's words made it sound as thought his thoughts were so dirty. "If it isn't love then what is their relationship?" He said coolly, "Don't tell me Xi Rong is so servile and obedient towards Xiao Jie out of selfless loyalty."

Gu Fuzhou said, "Before Xiao Jie's biological mother was favored by the Emperor one drunken night, she had an affair with an imperial guard and a child was conceived. There were few people in the provincial palace and they

had no proper master. That palace maid managed to hide her pregnancy for seven to eight months and successfully gave birth to a baby boy."

Lin Qingyu was surprised, "You mean… Xiao Jie and Xi Rong are half-brothers?"

Gu Fuzhou nodded. "When the palace maid delivered Xi Rong, she asked someone to get him out of the palace and sent him to a distant relative to raise. That distant relative raised Xi Rong until he was nine and then sent him back to the palace. After Xi Rong was castrated, he became Xiao Jie's personal little eunuch. However, when all is said and done, these two are only supporting characters and there is not much written about them in the book. How Xi Rong regards Xiao Jie, only he himself knows."

"Does Xi Rong know of his own identity?"

"He knows. And it's because he knows that he protects Xiao Jie. As he kept protecting and protecting him, his ambitions grew. They were born from the same mother, for what reason should one be a prince and the other a eunuch? If his younger brother prince ascends the throne one day, would that not make him the imperial older brother of the monarch of a country?" Speaking of this matter, Gu Fuzhou thought that there were some things that he needed to notify Lin Qingyu of in advance. "Qingyu, at the end of the original book "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch", Xi Rong continued protecting Xiao Jie and in the end, he went with Xiao Jie to his fief. I told you before that Xi Rong is a smart person and he won't easily be controlled by others. A monarch without

any subtlety or shrewdness coupled with a eunuch who yearns for power, to top it off, they're even brothers — this isn't anything good."

Lin Qingyu knew what Gu Fuzhou wanted to imply. He asked, "Then in the original book, was Xiao Cheng a good emperor?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled sarcastically: "The author didn't write it in detail, only briefly mentioning that after Xiao Cheng made Shen Huaishi empress, the Dayu prospered and all nations came to pay tribute. Qingyu, if you're someone who care about the people of the country, you should let him go, so as not to impede the fortune of the country."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "According to what you said, then Jing Ke shouldn't have gone to assassinate the King of Qin so as not to interfere with the Qin's domination of the world."

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows: "I didn't say that."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "If I really do manage to raise Xiao Jie to the throne, I will, of course, watch over the two brothers. If they won't be willing to listen,

then I'll have them changed to someone who will. Xiao Jie isn't the only one with the surname Xiao."

"Then, it would be better if you were to become emperor yourself." Gu Fuzhou said, drawn-out and unhurried, "How did that saying go? 'Better seeds than nobles and ministers', right?"

Lin Qingyu glanced at Gu Fuzhou, his expression brightening. "There's no joy to be had in doing bad things when you're the emperor. — It's boring."

Lin Qingyu returned to the study and called Huan Tong. "Deliver a visiting card to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion. Tell them the death anniversary of Young Master Hou is soon and I wish to go and light incense for him."

Huan Tong was surprised. "Has it already been a year since Young Master Hou departed?"

"En."

Huan Tong felt a sense of loss. "The days go by so fast."

In addition to Lin Qingyu, Hua Lu too kept in mind Lu Wancheng's death day and she had long prepared a sumptuous offering. When she was preparing the

dried fruit, Gu Fuzhou happened to see her. Seeing so many things laid out, Gu Fuzhou thought that they were having guests.

Hua Lu was unsure whether to inform the General of Young Master Hou's coming death anniversary and she cast hesitant looks towards Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu asked, "Did you forget?"

Gu Fuzhou said, "Did I forget what?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment. "It's nothing."

Lu Wancheng's final days were excruciatingly hard. He had been deliriously ill and it was but natural that he couldn't remember that day. Even grated that half a day of terminal lucidity, he hadn't even been able to see.

Gu Fuzhou being unable to remember was also a good thing. After all, it wasn't anything that would make him happy.

The day before Lu Wancheng's death anniversary, the capital had it's first snowfall of winter. The snow fell heavily. It kept coming down and within half a day, the courtyard was already covered in a thick layer of snow.

Gu Fuzhou returned to mansion after morning court and couldn't wait to change out of his official uniforms. Afterwards, he went looking for Lin

Qingyu in the study. “Qingyu, the snow outside’s so deep already. Let’s go build a snowman.”

Lin Qingyu wasn’t in the mood. “This isn’t the first time it’s snowed. What’s this about building a snowman?”

“It hardly ever snowed in my hometown. For me, not building a snowman on a snowy day is simply a waste of one’s life.” Gu Fuzhou put out his hand to block Lin Qingyu’s eyes, preventing him from reading, “Let’s go, Qingyu. Come and accompany your husband in playing outside today, eh?”

“Get Huan Tong to play with you.”

Gu Fuzhou wouldn’t leave even after being shoo-ed away. “Doctor Lin is being so cold. Did something happen?”

Lin Qingyu paused. “No.”

Gu Fuzhou asked worriedly, “Am I bothering you? Should I go?”

Lin Qingyu was momentarily stunned. He then tried his best to smile. “How could you possibly be bothering me? I just…don’t like snow.”

Gu Fuzhou looked pensive. “Because of me, you…”

Lin Qingyu interrupted him. “When it snows, I don’t know when the medicines I have been drying will finish. For doctors, rainy and snowy days

are never as good as sunny ones."

Gu Fuzhou didn't continue insisting nor did he go to find Huan Tong to build a snowman. He took a book from the shelf and accompanied Lin Qingyu, quietly reading.

The snow fell from day to night and it felt like even the inside was the quilt was covered with frost. Probably because of the excessive cold, it took a long time for Lin Qingyu to feel sleepy. And finally falling asleep, he suddenly woke up from a dream in the middle of the night.

There is no light in the room. He borrowed the light of the moon and snow to make out the outlines of the furniture. Lin Qingyu's heart was beating like a drum. He got out of the bed, barefoot and looked towards the upper bunk.

— The bed was empty.

Lin Qingyu's limbs grew cold. The dream and reality seemed to intertwine. He stood in front of the bed, forcing himself to remain calm, telling himself over

and over that it was just a dream. And yet, his body still uncontrollably froze in place. He couldn't move.

There came a creaking sound from the door behind him. Lin Qingyu turned around abruptly and saw the man's tall figure.

"Qingyu?" Gu Fuzhou said in surprise, "Why are you awake?"

Lin Qingyu opened his mouth. He wanted to speak, but no words would come out.

Gu Fuzhou lit the lamp. When he met Lin Qingyu's eyes, his expression changed. He walked up to him quickly and asked, "What's wrong?"

"Where were you?" Lin Qingyu forced himself to speak and found that his voice was frighteningly low and hoarse.

"I woke up from hunger in the middle of the night, so I went out and asked Hua Lu to make me a bowl of noodles." Gu Fuzhou held his cheeks, "Why are

your eyes red? Are you angry that I didn't share; so angry that it made you want to cry?"

Gu Fuzhou's palms were warm, so warm that it made Lin Qingyu's eyes sting even more. Lin Qingyu shook his head, lowered his eyes and said softly, "I just wanted to… see if you were still there."

Gu Fuzhou grew quiet. Suddenly, he picked him up and walked towards the bed. He then, placed him on it.

Lin Qingyu was momentarily dazed, feeling that this situation seemed a bit familiar. He suddenly had that mistaken feeling that he was in a dream.

Gu Fuzhou knelt in front of the bed and looked up at him. "The day I died, it also snowed, didn't it?"

Lin Qingyu asked, "Didn't you see it?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled: "Yes, I saw it."

Lin Qingyu felt choked. He gritted his teeth: "…Liar."

Gu Fuzhou made no comment on it. "Don't think about the past anymore. Am I not doing well now?"

"I don't think about it often." Lin Qingyu hesitated and then said what was in

his heart, “I’m… a little scared.”

He was never one to show his vulnerable side in front of others; not even in front of Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou. This was the first time.

“Don’t be afraid, don’t be afraid. Think about it; I’m using General Gu’s body this time. General Gu is so strong, I definitely won’t die from illness like last time. And I’m not on the battlefield now either — Even if I were, I would just be coming up with lousy ideas in the accounts. I’m not going to die in battle.” Gu Fuzhou smiled. Even though he looked like a 30-year-old man, his smile was as bright and clear as a sunny day. “So , I will always be be here.”

But Lin Qingyu was still worried. “Is that true?”

“It’s true, I swear. — How about I write you a letter of guarantee?” Gu Fuzhou said. He really went to the table and laid out a piece of paper and started writing. As he wrote and wrote, he laughed, “However, I am twelve years older than you. You’ll probably still have to see me off in fifty years.”

Lin Qingyu tilted his head and laughed softly.

Hearing his laughter, Gu Fuzhou raised his eyes to look.

The ruthless and wicked beauty sat on the bed; a slight smile at the corner of his lips; his eyes, a deep vast pool, looking at him tenderly.

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Chapter 71

After Gu Fuzhou wrote the letter of guarantee, he solemnly handed it to Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu took a look. True to Gu Fuzhou's usual style, it was written entirely in casual speech. Whenever Gu Fuzhou wrote letters to others or wrote his reports to the emperor, he often used refined, graceful words. His literary talent was not particularly remarkable, he was still a head above his military peers. Only when writing something for him did Gu Fuzhou write in whatever way he felt most comfortable. He would even occassionally include a few doodles.

Reason told Lin Qingyu that any promise or a guarantee was nothing more than wishful thinking on their part. When bad luck comes, how can a piece of paper be able to stop it? But for now, his heart was soothed by Gu Fuzhou's promise and guarantee.

Whether it was Lu Wancheng or Gu Fuzhou, no matter how much this person tended to ignore his proper duties, he has never let him down. Lin Qingyu was willing to believe him.

Lin Qingyu put away the letter of guarantee. "I'm fine."

Gu Fuzhou breathed a sigh of relief. But at the same time felt a little regretful. A sensitive, vulnerable beauty with eyes rimmed red is truly a rare sight to behold. Being looked at so tenderly by Lin Qingyu, he felt for a few moments

that he was in danger falling into inextinguishable burning heat. It seemed that Lin Qingyu only need to say it and he would give him anything, even if it was getting up early for him for the rest of his life.

Lin Qingyu was also feeling embarrassed because of his brief loss of control. He pretended to be calm and collected and said, “Let’s go to sleep.”

“Alright.” Gu Fuzhou lifted the quilt, helped Lin Qingyu to lie down and then lay down himself.

Lin Qingyu’s eyes widened slightly. “You…”

Gu Fuzhou’s cheeks grew hot and while spurning his shamelessness, he covered both himself and Lin Qingyu with the quilt and said, sounding all natural, “I’ll coax you to sleep before I head up.”

“You? Coax me to sleep?” Lin Qingyu said with a smile, “And who is it who falls asleep as soon as his head hits the pillow?”

When Gu Fuzhou asked the carpenter to make the bunkbed, he hadnt’t considered that he would be sleeping with Lin Qingyu in General Gu’s body. Two teenagers in the bottom bunk was just right. Now, it was obviously cramp and crowded. He had changed bodies and Lin Qingyu also grew a bit. The ill-tempered little beauty of the past had turned into a deep-thinking great beauty. No matter how bad his temper, he knew when to restrain himself,

finding a way behind their backs to take those people's lives. Only in front of Gu Fuzhou would he unscrupulously expose his malice.

Gu Fuzhou laughed and leaned in closer to Lin Qingyu. Their long hair lay scattered on the pillow, intertwining.

"Want to hear a bedtime story?" Gu Fuzhou asked.

Lin Qingyu said: "Tell me about your hometown."

"You seem to be quite interested in this."

"I'm interested in everything about you."

Gu Fuzhou smiled. "Then let me tell you about the mobile phone. The mobile phone is a very important tool in my hometown. If one day, you go to my hometown and you get separated from me, you can use the mobile phone to find me. You just have to record down this string of numbers first…"

As Gu Fuzhou spoke, his voice became fainter and fainter and it didn't take long for him to fall completely silent. To be honest, Lin Qingyu was already surprised that he managed to last so long before falling asleep. Lin Qingyu tucked in the quilt and beside Gu Fuzhou's pillow, closed his eyes.

After an unknown amount of time, when he felt that Lin Qingyu's breathing had turned slow and even for a long time, Gu Fuzhou cracked open one eye

and after confirming that Lin Qingyu was indeed asleep, he opened the other one.

Gu Fuzhou's eyes were clear, without the slightest sign of drowsiness. He and Lin Qingyu were lying face to face. Their faces were so close together he couldn't even see the other's entire face. And yet, even this much was enough to send his heart shaking. He couldn't help reaching out his hand, plucking Lin Qingyu's long silky hair from his forehead and tucking it behind his ear. He said, a quiet whisper, "Good night, Qingyu."

The next day was Lu Wancheng's death anniversary. After Lin Qingyu saw Gu Fuzhou off to court, he took Huan Tong and Hua Lu to the Nan'an Hou's Mansion.

Not long ago, in October, Pan Shi had given birth to a healthy baby boy . The lifelessness was swept away from the Nan'an Hou's Mansion and it once again radiated with vitality. The happy event put heart into Nan'an Hou and thrived in the imperial court. Not only has he tightened his grasp over the Ministry of Revenue but the Emperor also placed great importance in his opinions.

When Lin Qingyu arrived at the Hou's Mansion, Nan'an Hou was at morning court and it was the Pan Shi who received him.

"I was wondering just yesterday whether Doctor Lin would be coming today." After giving birth to her child, Pan Shi was in relatively good spirits; merely that she had gotten a bit more plump. Although she still remained a concubine, the servants of the Hou Mansion already regarded her as their mistress. When

Pan Shi got pregnant, Nan'an Hou probably felt that he was still young and took in several concubines, on and off. Since nothing stirred in the bellies of these concubines, they dared not yet stir trouble in front of her.

Pan Shi had no intention of competing for favor. So, child in hand, she spent her days managing the household and living a good life.

Lin Qingyu said, "It's Young Master Hou's death anniversary. Of course, I would come. How is Young Master Hou's little brother?"

Pan Shi said with a gentle smile, "The little young master is fair and plump. He's a little heavier for babies his age. At the end of last month marked the end of the little young master's first month. I wanted to send an invitation to the General's Mansion," Pan Shi smile waned a little, "But Master Hou said…"

"Yiniang need not say more, I understand." Lin Qingyu looked at Hua Lu from out the corner of his eyes. Hua Lu understood it and took out a brocade box, saying, "This is a lock of longevity that the Young Master had specially made for the little Young Master Lu. We wish that the little young master may grow up safe and sound."

Pan Shi hurriedly got up with the help of a maid, "On behalf of the little young master, allow me to thank Doctor Lin."

After the two talked for a while, it was time for to make the offerings. Inside the Lu Family's ancestral hall, servants laid out cooked food in front of Lu Wancheng's memorial tablet, meaning to let the deceased "taste something

fresh". Later, they brought in a brazier and Lin Qingyu burned paper money as consolation for the dead. Pan Shi had specially invited monks from Changsheng Temple to chant sutras for Lu Wancheng.

By the time they had finished with everything it was almost meal time. Pan Shi was unsure whether to have Lin Qingyu stay for the meal. At this hour, Master Hou should also be coming back. Master Hou most certainly wouldn't want to see this former daughter-in-law of his.

Pan Shi hesitated but Lin Qingyu didn't take the initiative to leave. Not long after, the steward came to report that Nan'an Hou had returned. Pan Shi looked at Lin Qingyu in embarrassment. "Doctor Lin, this…"

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. "Perfect timing. It has been a long time since I've paid my respects to Master Hou."

When Nan'an Hou returned to the mansion and saw Lin Qingyu, his mood, already bad because of the death anniversary of his eldest son, was made even worse. Even if Lin Qingyu was now the wife of the great General Gu, he could not bring himself to muster a good expression. "What is the General's wife coming to my mansion for?"

"The General's wife is here to pay homage to the Eldest Young Master." Pan Shi coaxed, "He has been very considerate."

Nan'an Hou snorted coldly, and said, "When Lin Shi left the mansion that day, we agreed to cut all ties and to have nothing to do with each other in the

future. Our Lu Family never had any male wife and the General's wife has neither identity nor distinction in this mansion. Coming here are you not afraid of incurring the ridicule of others, making the General lose face?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently: "The general has a broad mind. The state of his home country is central in his mind. How could he possibly care about a trivial matter such as this? Master Hou need not worry for his sake."

Nan'an Hou was stifled with anger. "Are you here to insist on a tie with the Lu Family!"

"I have no wish to insist on any tie with the Lu Family, only that there is a certain matter pertaining to the Lu Family that I need to deal with." Lin Qingyu said, "Auntie, if there is nothing else, why don't you go and see to the little Young Master first?"

Knowing that Lin Qingyu was going to talk to Nan'an Hou alone, Pan Shi decided to withdraw with the servants. Seeing this, Nan'an Hou spoke

sarcastically even to Pan Shi, “Do you do whatever he asks you to? Have you forgotten who you belong to!”

Pan Shi was stunned. “Master Hou…”

Lin Qingyu didn’t have the patience to appreciate the matters of the Lu Family’s household. “Since it is Master Hou who wishes to have so many people spectate, you cannot blame me.”

“What do you mean?!”

Lin Qingyu said, “Hua Lu, go and invite Manager Zhang over.”

After Lin Qingyu left the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion, Zhang Shiquan stayed in the Hou’s Mansion to take care of the accounting affairs. He got the news early that morning that Lin Qingyu would be coming today and he had everything Lin Qingyu wanted ready, so he had already been waiting outside early on.

With a stack of ledgers in hand, Zhang Shiquan gave a round of greetings. “Greetings to the General’s wife, Master Hou, Yiniang.”

Nan’an Hou asked Lin Qingyu, “Why have you asked him here?”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes and Zhang Shiquan presented the stack of ledgers to Nan’an Hou. Nan’an Hou picked up the top book and looked at it

suspiciously. After a few pages, his expression became more and more solemn. “This-this is…”

Lin Qingyu said leisurely, “Judging from Master Hou’s appearance, it seems you had no knowledge of this matter.”

Nan’an Hou turned pale and everyone waved away, leaving only him, Lin Qingyu and Zhang Shiquan in the room. “What exactly is this?” Nan’an Hou said, “Where did these huge sums come from and why are they on the account books of the Hou Mansion!”

Zhang Shiquan looked to Lin Qingyu for instructions and after receiving his approval, he said, “What could Master Hou mean? All this money was earned through your second wife Liang Shi’s painstaking efforts. Naturally, it was thus recorded in the Hou Mansion’s account.”

Although Nan’an Hou seldom asked about the household affairs, he was still aware of the shops and villages run by the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion. Such a large sum of money could not have come from the income of several restaurants or villages. Two words popped out in his mind and he staggered in fright.

“Master Hou has probably guessed it.” Zhang Shiquan said, “In today’s world, only the illicit salt trade would be able to make such huge profits. According to

Dayu's law, selling more than a certain amount of illicit salt is a capital offense. Surely, Master Hou is aware of that?"

Naturally, Nan'an Hou knew. Not long ago, he had even personally handled a case of a local official operating an illicit salt business. The official's clan had been involved in the sale of illicit salt and because of the huge amount, he was finally sentenced to be executed. Looking at the sums in the ledger, Liang Shi's family had been operating at a scale that far surpassed that.

Nan'an Hou never expected that Liang Shi could bring about such a huge disaster even after her descent into madness. He wanted to kill her immediately. "That b*tch!" Eyes bulging, he glared at Lin Qingyu. "When did you find out? Why are you only telling me of it now!"

Lin Qingyu said, "Because, just as Master Hou has just said, I have no ties with the Nan'an Hou's Mansion and we have nothing to do with each other. Even if the Hou Mansion were to provoke His Majesty's fury and collapse overnight, I will continue to be my general's wife. Maybe the Emperor might reward even

reward me by reinstating me to my official position after seeing my meritorious service in exposing this matter. What do you think?

The word “expose” made Na’nan Hou, long versed in court struggles, shudder in fright. “You…”

Lin Qingyu went on, “Unfortunately, the little young master has just reached his first full month. Once this matter is exposed, who knows whether he’ll live to see his hundredth day?”

Nan’an Hou spoke irresponsibly, “Poisonous woman, actually threatening me with the life of an innocent child!” Nan’an Hou had lost his sons one after another and had this child in his old age. He regarded this child as more important than anything else. He was desperate to save this child.

“Threat?” Lin Qingyu smiled almost sympathetically, “Master Hou misunderstood. I simply kindly reminding Master Hou.”

Zhang Shiquan said, “Master Hou, it is your wife’s family who is behind this matter. For the sake of Young Master Hou’s face, the General’s wife has kept quiet regarding this matter, enabling you to return to court and regain His Majesty’s favor. If I were you, I would be thanking the General’s wife. How could you be making unscrupulous charges against him?”

Nan’an Hou’s officialdom had not been for nothing. Lin Qingyu concealing this matter and suddenly bringing it up now, meant that there was something he needed him to do. What he hated most was being controlled by others, but

for the Lu Family's glory and for the sake of his newborn child, he had to give in, "Say it. What do you want?"

Lin Qingyu smiled with satisfaction. "Don't worry, Master Hou, I won't have you do anything that would offend against Heaven and reason nor would I have you do anything that goes against your loyalty to the Emperor. I simply ask that you write a letter and asking the Emperor to confer to the Fourth Prince his title as feudal king."

The Marquis of Nan'an was taken aback. "The Fourth Prince?"

"Exactly."

It wasn't only to the Emperor that Xiao Jie had a low sense of presence; the same went for the court ministers. If Lin Qingyu hadn't mentioned it, Nan'an Hou would not have even remembered that this title had yet to be conferred.

Nan'an Hou asked suspiciously, "Is it that simple?"

"For now… it's that simple."

Nan'an Hou was feeling indecisive. The Fourth Prince was already of age; he had also already left the palace. It was reasonable that he be named feudal king.

The granting of this title though would risk the Crown Prince's displeasure. He asked again, "Why not have General Gu do this himself?"

Lin Qingyu snorted. "Has Master Hou been scared stupid?"

Nan'an Hou's anger flared. "Don't talk nonsense!"

"The Emperor and the Crown Prince are suspicious of the General and I do not wish for the General to be implicated." Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Does Master Hou understand what I mean?"

No matter how reluctant Nan'an Hou was, he could only say, "I… I understand."

With regards to the matter of Xiao Jie's title as feudal king, Nan'an Hou would bring it up in court but they would also need someone from the harem to provide support; only them would this be foolproof. The first one Lin Qingyu thought of was the Empress. The Empress used to take good care of him, but

ever since he married Gu Fuzhou, she had obviously turned cold towards him. He had gone several times to Fengyi Palace only be rebuked.

The Empress' love and righteousness was reserved only for her own family. In her eyes, Lin Qingyu remarrying someone else before his period of piety expired justified her turning against him.

Fortunately, aside from Lu Wancheng, there was one other person in the Empress' family and for her, he was the most important.

On this day, Lin Qingyu had just finished examining the Emperor's pulse. He went to the library of the Imperial Medical Office together with Hu Ji, who had just finished his rotation. Lin Qingyu went straight to the innermost area, where there was a locked iron door. He had previously obtained the Emperor's permission to access this room on the grounds that he "wished to see all the Emeperor's medical records ever since he began suffering from headaches".

The library's guard opened the door. After the two entered, Hu Ji asked curiously, "Doctor Lin, what are you looking for?"

Lin Qingyu said: "The Sixth Prince, Xiao Li's medical records."

The author has something to say: An Irresponsible Little Theater

Gu Fuzhou: If you go to my hometown one day, you can find me using a mobile phone. This is my mobile phone number…

And then the great beauty transmigrated from the past to the present.

One day, while Classmate Jiang was playing a game, about to get five kills, a message popped up on his phone.

Unknown number: Your wife got lost and borrowed my phone from me. He's asking you to quickly come and pick him up.

Classmate Jiang: ?

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Chapter 72

Xiao Li is the emperor's youngest son and his only son by the Empress. Only fifteen years old this year, he was supposed to be the object of admiration in the palace, growing up loved and pampered. However, due to his lack of innate intelligence, he was regarded as a disgrace by the Emperor and left neglected in the provincial palace. No matter how much the Empress thought of her son, she was only able to see him twice a year — once during the Mid-Autumn Festival and once during the New Year.

"The Sixth Prince?" Hu Ji asked, "Why are you suddenly interested in the Sixth Prince?"

Lin Qingyu found the row where the prince's medical records were stored. "I want to know how the Sixth Prince got sick."

Although Xiao Cheng had great respect for the Empress, his dimu, he was, after all, someone who had a biological mother. Moreover, his biological mother was a noble concubine with a distinguished status. When Xiao Cheng ascends the throne in the future, both the Empress and Concubine Chen would be Empress Dowagers — one, a muhou Empress Dowager and the other a shengmu Empress Dowager. Having been in control of the harem for so

long, naturally, the Empress wouldn't want to share power with another woman.

Anyone who didn't want Xiao Cheng to ascend to the throne could temporarily be his ally and to win over the Empress, Xiao Li was undoubtedly the best point of entry.

Xiao Li had been relegated to the provincial palace for more than ten years and the Emperor has kept his son's dullness a secret. He was spoken of very rarely in the palace. Lin Qingyu and Hu Ji have only entered the palace in recent years and the only thing they know about the sixth prince was that he was a dullard; as to how severe the dullness, they had no idea.

Hu Ji helped Lin Qingyu find the medical records. He said, "I heard that the Empress called for famous doctors to diagnose and treat the Sixth Prince. But no matter whether it was the imperial physicians in the capital or miracle working doctors of the Jianghu, they were all helpless in the face of the Sixth

Prince's illness. Given the circumstances, it would seem that his dullness is innate. There is no cure."

While Lin Qingyu agreed with Hu Ji's statement, Xiao Li was still his biggest bargaining chip to control the Empress. Therefore, this matter was worth him expending a bit of time.

"I found it!" Hu Ji took out a thick and heavy case of medical records. "Take a look and see if this is it."

Lin Qingyu took a look. "This is indeed the Sixth Prince's medical records."

The two immediately began reading it. Every doctor who examined Xiao Li said that his pulse was no different from that of any other person; they couldn't even find the cause of his illness so how could they possibly treat him?

Xiao Li's medical file was much thicker than others. At first, he was no different from the other princes. He was examined daily and before the age of two, he suffered nothing more serious than the occasional mild illness. But by two years of age, Xiao Li still could not speak. The Empress began to worry. More and more doctors were invited to the palace and more and more medical records were made. When Xiao Li was five years old, the Emperor gave up completely. Ignoring the Empress' pleas, he insisted on sending his youngest son to the provincial palace.

On the day Xiao Li left the palace, another person came to examine him. This person was no imperial physician. As a matter of fact, he wasn't any sort of

doctor, rather it was the National Teacher of Dayu, Xu Junyuan. The last record in the prince's file said: The National Teacher declares his illness to be a loss of soul and there is no cure for it.

"A loss of soul?" Hu Ji pondered, "I've heard my grandmother say that a newborn's soul is unstable. Given a terrible fright, it may just scare the soul away…"

Lin Qingyu asked, "Do you believe that?"

Hu Ji smiled, embarrassed, "I know doctors shouldn't believe this but there are many things that simply cannot be explained by common sense."

Lin Qingyu closed the medical file. "I didn't use to believe it. But now…"

Gu Fuzhou's soul can fly all over the world, what was Xiao Li's mere 'loss of soul' compared to that?

Hu Ji said, "If the Sixth Prince really has lost his soul then he is beyond help even if Hua Tuo were to be brought back to life."

Lin Qingyu thought for a moment and said, "I still want to see it with my own eyes. — Who is the Medical Officer for the provincial palace now?"

Whenever people in the palace spoke of a provincial palace, they often referred to Jinyang Garden. It was but a day's ride away; half if you spurred on a horse to full speed. Jinyang Garden was built facing the water and was used by the

Imperial family as a summer retreat. In recent years, the Emperor has been in poor health and has not visited Jinyang Garden in a long time. In Jinyang Garden, apart from a few old concubines, there was only one master, Xiao Li. The maids and eunuchs who serve there were naturally not as dedicated as those in the palace; even the medical officer was the lowest rank in the Imperial Hospital.

Lin Qingyu told his father of his intention to visit the sixth prince in the provincial palace. Father Lin ask no further questions and quickly made the arrangements for Lin Qingyu. The capital already experienced its first snowfall and the days were becoming colder and colder. A lot of people got sick. Generally speaking, imperial physician were reluctant to journey to places like the provincial palace. Father Lin, on the grounds that they were short-handed in the palace, dispatching a doctor who had no official position but with real talent and practical knowledge would not incur much comment from others.

The trip and back from Jinyang Garden would take Lin Qingyu two days by carriage. After Gu Fuzhou found out, he wanted to go with Lin Qingyu but

was ruthlessly rejected, “Don’t you need to attend morning court? Discuss government affairs?”

“I do.” Gu Fuzhou said bitterly, “But I’m sick, you see? I’ll wither if I don’t see Doctor Lin for even a single day.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Will this disease affect your sleep?”

“That’s a good question.” Gu Fuzhou rubbed his chin and said, “The last time I lost sleep was the last time.”

Lin Qingyu looked at Gu Fuzhou as though he were looking at a fool. Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “I meant back when I was in Yongliang. At that time

that son of b*tch Emperor refused to let me come back. I was so anxious I couldn't sleep."

Lin Qingyu calmly packed his medicine box. "It's obviously nothing big if it's not going to affect your sleep. — I'll be back as soon as possible."

Gu Fuzhou knew that Lin Qingyu was going there for business and he was simply all talk when it came to his complaints — in the end, he would definitely let him leave.

Lin Qingyu went unimpeded all the way. Once the guard at Jinyang Garden checked his identity, he was allowed through with a few cursory questions.

In Jinyang Garden, there were stacked up hills and chiseled out ponds; there was continous running water. It was outfitted with numerous pavilions, scattered high and low. It was a splendid sight in summer; in winter, only a sense of bleakness was left. Walking through the garden, only a handful eunuchs and maids sweeping the grounds could be seen. It wasn't even as lively as the General's Mansion.

Lin Qingyu followed the eunuch who led the way to the medical building. There was only one medical officer on duty — a fat man, his stomach almost bursting out of his official uniform, roasting sweet potatoes by the charcoal fire. Hearing footsteps, he didn't lift his head, saying, "There is no medicine

here. If you are sick, you can either go out and find a doctor or you can concont the medicine yourself."

The eunuch-guide said, "Imperial Physician Huang, someone from the Imperial Medical Office is here."

When the medical officer surnamed Huang heard the words "Imperial Medical Office", he immediately stood up. Seeing Lin Qingyu, he was given another shock. "You are…"

"My surname is Lin."

There were very few with the surname Lin within the Imperial Medical Office and the person in front of him was of such outstanding looks that he easily

guessed his identity with only that bit to go on. Imperial Physician Huang smiled and said, “Ah, it’s the General’s wife. Please excuse my rudeness.”

“You said just now that this clinic is out of medicine?”

“It’s but natural.” Imperial Physician Huang sneered at Lin Qingyu’s icy expression. “With the coming of winter begins, lots of people get sick. For Coughs and colds, naturally, the medicine I have simply isn’t enough. ”

“Then in case His Highness falls ill, do you expect him to ‘either go out and find a doctor or concoct the medicine’ himself?

Imperial Physician Huang was momentarily at a loss for words. “This… what is the General’s wife saying? His Highness the Sixth Prince is in good health.”

“I said, ‘in case’.”

“We-well then we will definitely find a way. His Highness is the Emperor’s son. Even if we each had nine heads more than one, we would not dare to neglect his condition.”

When Lin Qingyu had served as an official in the palace for a long time. He was long accustomed to dealing with people who insist on acting wilfully,

showing outward devotion but inner opposition. “Where is His Highness now?” he said, “Today, I have come to examine His Highness.”

Imperial Physician Huang complained bitterly in his heart. But for fear that Lin Qingyu would blab to the Yuan Pan, maybe even reporting to the Empress, he had no choice but to carefully try his best to please, “Yes, I ask the General’s wife to please come this way.”

Lin Qingyu reached the pavilion where Xiao Li resided. As soon as he entered the gate, he saw a young man dressed in black brocade squatting in the snow,

his head lowered, playing some unknown game. It was such a cold day, yet the boy didn't even have a cloak on.

Lin Qingyu asked the eunuch who guided their way, "Is this His Highness the Sixth Prince?"

The eunuch readily affirmed, "Yes…"

Though there were people talking nearby, Xiao Li gave no response. He inserted his hand, red from the cold, into the snow. He dug up a handful of snow and stuffed it into his mouth.

"Your Highness!" The eunuch rushed to Xiao Li's side and grabbed his hand, "You can't eat this."

With the eunuch's pull, the snow in Xiao Li's hand fell to the ground. He stared blankly at the ground. He then slowly stood up and looked at Lin Qingyu.

When their eyes met, Lin Qingyu was slightly startled.

Xiao Li was born with outstanding physical qualities. With a slender figure, at the age of around fifteen or sixteen, he was as already as tall as Lin Qingyu. His brows were delicate and evenly-spread, his facial features imposingly handsome. However, his eyes were blank. He appeared lifeless and dull. No

matter how unsurpassed his appearance, his spiritless manner lowered its overall quality.

For some reason, Lin Qingyu always felt that Xiao Li's appearance was somewhat familiar.

Lin Qingyu saluted Xiao Li, "Student Lin Qingyu greets Your Highness."

Xiao Li still did not respond. He squatted back again, repeating his previous action of digging and eating snow.

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Where are the momos who look after His Highness?"

The eunuch was so nervous that he broke out in a cold sweat. "I'll go find them now!"

Lin Qingyu stood beside Xiao Li, watching him for a while. He then stretched out his hand and helped the young man up. "Your Highness, let's go inside."

Xiao Li let him support him up, neither crying nor making trouble, like a walking corpse. Lin Qingyu asked him to sit on a chair then took out a wrist pillow to diagnose his pulse. The only thing he could glean was that Xiao Li was suffering from a cold. However, other than that, he was indeed no different from any other person.

Lin Qingyu finally understood what was meant by "a loss of soul". The Sixth Prince, Xiao Li, truly was left with only an exquisite body; his inner essense

was gone.

After a while, the maids and eunuchs serving Xiao Li arrived, each sporting an ugly expression.

These were all Xiao Li's long-term servants. Although this Sixth Prince was the Emperor's son, he was shunned by the Emperor and the Empress is able only to see him twice a year. The Sixth Prince couldn't speak, he couldn't speak up even when he was being treated harshly. So long as they went through the motions whenever the Empress sent someone to inspect, they could go lazing about all the other days.

Lin Qingyu didn't even ask where they were just now. His ordered, "His Highness is cold. Go and cook a bowl of ginger soup."

While everyone was busying about, Xiao Li sat there motionless, as though he didn't exist in this world.

Lin Qingyu wrote out a prescription for Xiao Li to ward off the cold. He asked the eunuch to hand it over to Imperial Physician Huang. "I know that there is

no medicine in the clinic. I will ask my father to inform the Empress about this and have her send more medicine."

This single sentence cost them nearly half their lives. "Doctor Lin, these servants know we've done wrong. We shall definitely serve His Highness well in the future… We beg you…"

Lin Qingyu smiled compassionately, "You may tell this to the Empress later."

Lin Qingyu didn't stay in Jinyang Garden for long. He drove through the night and returned to the capital the next day.

"Doctor Lin is finally back." Gu Fuzhou had just arrived home, still in his official uniform. He welcomed Lin Qingyu at the door, "It's true what they say, ' A separation of two days feels like a separation of two days. '"

Lin Qingyu frowned. "What nonsense are you talking about?"

Gu Fuzhou held back a smile: "It's nothing." He took the fox fur cloak that Lin Qingyu took off and hung it on his arm, "It's been so long since we've seen each toher. Could it be that there's something you want to tell me?"

"Yes." Lin Qingyu stepped into the room, "But I will have to inconvenience the General to make me a cup of tea first."

After drinking the tea made by his husband, Lin Qingyu recounted to Gu Fuzhou everything that had happened at Jinyang Garden. "Tomorrow I will go

to see the Empress again. I believe she will want to see me this time."

Gu Fuzhou listened absent-mindedly, "What else?"

"What else?"

"What else do you want to tell me?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and asked, "What did you look like before?"

Gu Fuzhou hadn't expected for Lin Qingyu to suddenly ask this. "Really? Didn't you see it in the dream?"

Lin Qingyu felt inexplicably guilty. "I forgot."

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows. "Didn't you say you have a highly-retentive memory? How could you forget what I looked like?"

Lin Qingyu made no change in his expression "How can dreams and the real world be compared? Looking at people in dreams is like looking at the moon

reflected on water or at flowers through a fog. It's always separated by a layer. It's only normal that I would forget."

"Well, I don't know how to describe it to you." Gu Fuzhou said, "Besides, I haven't been in my original body for so long. It's been two years. I myself have probably forgetten my original appearance. ."

Lin Qingyu was lost in thought. The Gu Fuzhou in his dream had once made his eyes shine. Compared with Xiao Li, he gave him a far different feeling but he was also a handsome young man. Too bad, he was a dullard.

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu for a long time. He sighed: "How annoying."

Lin Qingyu came back to his sense. "What's so annoying?"

"Because, for the past two days, it seems like you didn't miss me at all."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Gu Fuzhou had just been casually complaining. He wasn't actually expecting a response from Lin Qingyu. They'd been discussing for so long and he was

begining to feel sleepy when suddenly, he heard Lin Qingyu say, “Not necessarily.”

Gu Fuzhou was slow to respond, not fully realizing it yet, “…Huh?”

Cheeks warm, Lin Qingyu quickly changed the subject, “I’m hungry, let’s eat.”

The author has something to say: Salted fish: Where is zhen’s imperial translator? What does ‘not necessarily’ mean?

Chapter 73

On the second day, when Lin Qingyu went to the palace to examine the Emperor's pulse, the Empress and Concubine Chen happened to also be there. The Empress was in charge of the harem and Concubine Chen assisted her. The three were discussing the arrangments for the New Year's celebration in the palace.

The Empress and Concubine Chen were both beautiful women in their youth. Now that they were getting on in the years, the Empress looked graceful and dignified, with a temperament befitting the mother of the nation; Concubine Chen was careful to maintain her looked and she has been favored for many years. She was like a peony in full bloom, looking barely over thirty.

Lin Qingyu knelt down and saluted the three, "Paying my respects to the Emperor, the Empress, Concubine Chen."

The Emperor was vexed by the two women on either side. Seeing Lin Qingyu, he felt even more so that his wife and concubine were making senseless fuss.

Lin Qingyu, without any official position, was wearing a crescent white uniform. His simple, unadorned style seized everyone's attention.

When the Empress saw him, her face turned cold. Concubine Chen though was rather polite to him. "The Emperor's headaches have improved a lot recently. This is thanks to Doctor Lin's hard work."

Lin Qingyu said, "It is the good fortune of this student to share the burdens of His Majesty."

"I heard it was Doctor Lin who found the cure for the epidemic that was ravaging the south last year." Concubine Chen pulled the emperor's arm, "Your Majesty, this concubine wishes to borrow Doctor Lin's services."

The emperor asked absent-mindedly, "Where does Aifei feel unwell?"

"Not I but the Crown Prince." Concubine Chen's brows were knitted together, her eyes brimming with motherly love. "Ever since the Crown Prince met… met with that serious illness, his health has never recovered to how it was before, no matter how much medicine he takes. When all is said and done, they're all incompetent doctors of the Imperial Hospital. They were unable to

cure the Emperor's headaches and they've also failed to restore the Crown Prince's health."

The emperor's expression was indifferent. "As they say, mental worries cannot be cured by medicine. Otherwise, the Crown Prince wouldn't handle so carelessly the duties Zhen has assigned to him."

Concubine Chen's expression changed slightly and her fingers tightened. She forced on a smile. "I am sure the Crown Prince must be doing his best to do his

duties properly. It may be that he is a bit unable to do as much as he would wish."

Lin Qingyu quietly glanced at the Empress. The Empress concealed her expressions well; neither joy nor anger could be seen.

"Forget it." The Emperor stretched out his wrist and said to Lin Qingyu, "Later, go the Eastern Palace and examine the Crown Prince."

Lin Qingyu replied, "Yes."

The Empress hesitated for a moment and said, "The list of attendees for the New Year's Eve family banquet has been drawn up. I ask His Majesty to please take a look."

There was no need for the Emperor to weigh in on this. "No need. I have every confidence in the Empress' arrangements."

"Your Majesty, it may be best to take a look still." Concubine Chen raised the corners of her lips, "The Empress has reserved a place for the Sixth Prince this time."

The emperor said, displeased, "Is this true?"

The empress knelt down quickly, no longer as calm and composed as before. "New Year's Eve is a time for family to come together. Li'er is the Emperor and

mine's flesh and blood, the brother of the princes and princesses…"

The emperor interrupted coldly. "The Sixth Prince doesn't understand any of this. Why even go through the trouble of having him come?"

The empress begged, "Your Majesty…"

"Empress Niangniang, please say no more." Concubine Chen donned on a kind-hearted expression, making as though to smooth things over, "The Emperor is about to get angry."

The emperor was rather impatient. "Enough. Both of you withdraw."

The empress said, silently enduring, "I shall take my leave."

The empress and Concubine Chen left. Lin Qingyu too had finished with his examination. "The Emperor's headache has yet to be eradicated and the matters of state affairs are arduous. His Majesty should try to get some more rest."

Why would the emperor not want to get more rest? He used to have a Crown Prince who could supervise the country in his stead but right now, the Crown

Prince's heart and mind were who knows where. There were now a lot of matters that only he himself could attend to.

The Emperor stared at Lin Qingyu. Suddenly, he asked, "You have been married to Gu Fuzhou for a while, have you not?"

"Yes."

"How has he been treating you?"

Lin Qingyu smiled. "The General treats me very well."

The emperor was becoming more flighty and impetuous. He brandished his hand and waved him away.

After Lin Qingyu left Qinzheng Hall, he headed directly to Fengyi Palace, asking to see the empress. When the maid of Fengyi Palace saw him, she didn't

even bother announcing his arrival, saying simply, “Her Majesty won’t see you. Doctor Lin, please go back.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Two days ago, I went to Jinyang Garden.”

The palace maid who had already turned around, suddenly stopped.

“There are somethings I wish to tell the Empress about His Highness, the Sixth Prince. Can you tell her that for me, miss?”

After the palace maid passed on that message, Lin Qingyu was invited into the Fengyi Palace. The Empress was already sad that she couldn’t be reunited with her son on New Year’s Eve; hearing that Lin Qingyu had news about Xiao Li,

she couldn't being herself to care about her past grievances and immediately asked, "Has something happended to Li'er in Jinyang Garden?"

Lin Qingyu said slowly, "Not quite."

"What do you mean?" The Empress said anxiously, "Is Li'er doing well?"

Lin Qingyu shook his head. "Not well – not well at all. When I saw His Highness, he was squatting in the snow, without even a coat on. He was digging snow to eat."

The always sedate empress' eyes suddenly turned red. "Ho-how could this be… Lai Fu! Bring Lai Fu to me!"

The Empress was unable to leave the palace to visit her son. She could only send, from time to time, her eunuch, Lai Fu to visit Jinyang Garden. All the things she had sent before were all received properly and Lai Fu came back reporting good tidings every time, saying that the Sixth Prince was doing well in the provincial palace. She had always believed that although her Li'er might not be as well off as the princes who grew up in the palace, he nevertheless lived the life of a rich noble's son. Who would have thought that those servants

would dare to put on show and then act this way behind her back. They've been lying to her for so many years.

Faced with the Empress' intense questioning, Lai Fu said sadly, "This servant had been wronged, Madam! Every time this servant went to Jinyang Garden, His Highness was always well served! This servant truly was unaware!"

The Empress had already lost all rationality and she wanted to torture a confession out of him but was stopped by Lin Qingyu. "Lai Fu is the Empress' trusted aide and he is also loyal to Your Majesty. The problem must lie in Jinyang Garden. The Emperor has not been to the provincial palace for many years. The garden's servants have grown lazy. Unable to receive any reward from their master, they will naturally try everything to earn pickings"

Thinking of her son's situation in the provincial palace, the Empress couldn't help weeping. "They're taking advantage of Li'er! Taking advantage of his inability to understand, to speak out… My Li'er…"

Even though the Empress was the mother of the country, right at this moment, was nothing more than an ordinary mother. When she cried, she didn't cry loudly, wailing like most people. She shed her tears silently. The palace maid handed over a clean handkerchief. "Madam, please look after your body. If the

Madam collapses from weeping, who will the Sixth Prince be able to depend on?"

The empress wiped her tears and bestirred herself. "You're right. Those servants in Jinyang Garden are still waiting for me to clean them up."

Lin Qingyu said, "Even if Your Majesty were to replace all the people in Jinyang Garden, how can it be ensures that the new servants won't treat His Highness just as harshly in the future?"

The empress glared at him. "Then what do you think I should do?"

"The best way is to take His Highness back to the palace so that Your Majesty can personally look after him."

The empress let out a strange smile. "You think I don't want to? You saw it today. The Emperor doesn't even want to see Li'er at the New Year's Eve banquet. How could he allow me to keep Li'er by my side?"

Lin Qingyu pretended to think. "It would be difficult to change His Majesty's thinking. Perhaps Your Majesty may be able to speak to the Crown Prince and have him speak to the Emperor."

"The Crown Prince?" The empress said coldly, "And I thought you were smart. The Crown Prince and Concubine Chen want nothing more that to have Li'er

as far away from the palace as possible. Why would he ever speak for me?"

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "Then, with this being the case, even when the Empress becomes Empress Dowager in the future, Her Majesty will still have to endure the pain of separation."

The Empress had a vague sense of what Lin Qingyu was trying to imply. Her heart suddenly tightened. She asked the others to withdraw. She asked uncertainly, "Do you know what you're saying?"

"Once the Crown Prince ascends the throne, what will happen to you and the Sixth Prince? Your Majesty must certainly have thought about this more than I have."

"Presumptuous!" The Empress' eyes turned fierce, "You dare to discuss with me matters of the successorship. Are you not afraid of losing your head!"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "All that I've said are matters that the Young Master Hou had been concerned about before his death."

The empress was stunned. "Wancheng…?"

"Her Majestry treated Young Master Hou like her own child and the Young Master has always kept you and His Highness in his thoughts. He had been worried about your situation in the palace, worried that Concubine Chen

might make things difficult for you. He asked me to do my best to share Her Majesty's worries."

The empress looked at him coldly. "If you truly held Wancheng in your heart, how could you marry someone else even before his body has had time to grow cold!"

Lin Qingyu sighed softly, "If I don't do this, how can I help Her Majesty?"

The empress looked fixedly at Lin Qingyu. The man in front of her stood tall, bright and handsome. His eyes were like deep pools enticing people to approach and then looking for the right moment to drown them.

Lin Qingyu may have ulterior motives, but of this there was no doubt: If Xiao Ting succeeds in ascending to the throne, her Li'er will never ever make it back home in her lifetime.

After weighing the matter several times over, the Empress said calmly, "What would you like me to do?"

A few days later, the Nan'an Hou asked for an audience with the emperor. He proposed that Xiao Jie be given his title as feudal king. The emperor was a little surprised. The Nan'an Hou had never been one to involve himself in political struggles. When the struggle for succession was the most intense, he had never

spoken for any prince. Why would he speak for the mediocre Fourth Prince now?

The Nan'an Hou brought out the reasons that Lin Qingyu had thought of in advance. "The Crown Prince used to show talent for governing the country but has lost heart due to his illness. The minister thinks that Your Majesty could use this conferring of title to the Fourth Prince as a reprimand to the Crown Prince. While the battle between the princes may be terrible, it can also useful."

The emperor listened to his counsel but did not immediately express his position, saying only, "Let me consider this matter."

In the blink of an eye, it was New Year's Eve. Concubines, princes and princesses gathered together for New Year's Eve dinner. During the banquet, there was signing and dancing; everyone talked and laughed. It was really lively.

Seeing that the emperor was in good spirits, the empress smiled and said, "The Fourth Prince will be nineteen after the new year. It's about time to find him a concubine."

Xiao Jie had just bitten into a piece of food. He hurriedly swallowed it whole. "Thank you for the Empress Mother's concern. Yo-your son is in a hurry."

"What do you mean in no hurry?" The empress rebuked, "When your uncles were your age, not to mention married, several of them were even already

fathers."

The empress' words reminded the emperor of the Nan'an Hou's suggestion. He glanced at Xiao Cheng. He was absently holding a wine cup, his expression dejected, showing none of his high-spiritedness of before. And thus, the emperor immediately made a decision.

——Xiao Jie was conferred the title of feudal king, King Ning, at the New Year's Eve palace banquet.

Compared with the liveliness in the palace, the General's mansion was a lot more sedate. Only the two masters, the General and his wife, celebrated the New Year together. Even so, Yuan Yin still decorated the entire mansion. Paper decor were pasted on the windows, lanterns hung below the eaves. The whole place looked jubilant.

After the New Year's Eve dinner was served, Lin Qingyu gave his servants leave. Gu Fuzhou moved the table out to the outdoor corridor and the two sat under the red lantern, drinking while admiring the moon.

With their plan already in motion, Lin Qingyu allowed himself a few more glasses. His face appeared flush; even the teardrop mole underneath his eye took on a crimson hue. Gu Fuzhou's alcohol tolerance was tempered in the military camp and he had a larger capacity for alcohol than Lin Qingyu. Seeing

that Lin Qingyu was a little tipsy, he said, “Should I carry you back to the room?”

Lin Qingyu rested his forehead on his hand. He looked at him with drunken eyes, appearing as though shrouded in light. “Why do you like carrying me so much…”

Gu Fuzhou said half truthfully, “Because I like appearing handsome in front of you.”

Lin Qingyu laughed and lazily stretched out his hand to Gu Fuzhou. He invited, “Come on then.”

Gu Fuzhou leaned over and took Lin Qingyu into his arms. The two of them were too different in stature. Such a hug made Lin Qingyu appear even more smaller. In fact, he was considered slender among men his age.

Gu Fuzhou returned to the room and sat down at the edge the bed but instead of putting Lin Qingyu down, he let him sit on his lap. “Would you like to drink sobering soup?”

Lin Qingyu put his arms around his neck. He leaned in close to his ear and asked in a hoarse voice, “What are you…hard for?”

Gu Fuzhou chuckled. He said, vexed, “Oh? I’ve been found out. I’m sorry, but I can’t do anything about it.” His voice was low and cut into Lin Qingyu’s ears. “I

miss it too much."

The corners of Lin Qingyu's red eyes slightly picked up. "Miss it?"

Gu Fuzhou's Adam's apple bobbed and he asked, "Qingyu, do you still only like girls?"

A mist of confusion appeared in Lin Qingyu's eyes, as if he himself didn't even know the answer.

Gu Fuzhou sighed, got up and put Lin Qingyu down on the bed. He was about to head out, planning to look for someone to cook sobering soup. Just as he turned around, he felt that something pull on his sleeve. He looked down, and met Lin Qingyu's eyes.

Lin Qingyu's breath was suffused with hot wine. "…Not necessarily."

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Chapter 74

Gu Fuzhou repeatedly pondered the words “not necessarily”. Lin Qingyu did “not necessarily” not miss him; did “not necessarily” only like girls.

How exactly was he supposed to take this? Why won’t Lin Qingyu just answer him directly? Could it be that Lin Qingyu was… not exactly in love — don’t lie — but just liked him a little?

He wanted to ask more questions, but the tipsy great beauty had already closed his eyes, though he still clutched the corner of his sleeve.

Gu Fuzhou consoled himself: No rush, no rush. Take it slowly. This is also a kind of sincerity. It takes time for a straight man to turn into a cut-sleeve. He was able to carry Lin Qingyu after having known each other for two years. At the rate they were going, he might just be able to kiss his forehead in another eight or ten years.

Oh, shit.

The sobering soup was useless at this point. Gu Fuzhou took off his clothes and lay down beside Lin Qingyu. Once again, he was sleeping in the same bed with Lin Qingyu and his reaction showed no signs of fading. He didn’t expect

that a body in its thirties would be so energetic even after drinking alcohol. It was making him feel a little uncomfortable.

However, this body truly hasn't vented for a very long time and enduring it any longer would be bad for the body.

Gu Fuzhou spent a little while just looking at Lin Qingyu's sleeping face. Looking at it sent his heart aflame. He then looked around the room — the towels he could use for wiping and cleaning were on the shelf a few steps away from the bed; there was no hot water in the house and if he really were to do something, he would have to call someone to bring in water to wash his hands. It was so cold outside and the bed was oh so warm.

Gu Fuzhou hesitated. He hesitated and hesitated again. In the end, he chose to simply lie down and accept his fate.

Forget it. Just go to sleep. You won't have to think about it when you're asleep. Maybe there'll be something exciting in his dreams.

On the first day of the new year, Lin Qingyu got up half an hour later than usual. Occasionally, drinking a little wine helps him sleep. He slept very well last night. When he woke up, he felt good but he was a little thirsty.

Lin Qingyu moved a little and his back bumped into a warm and firm chest. He had only been tipsy last night and he remembered clearly what had he said

and done. When Gu Fuzhou went to bed, he hadn't even fallen completely asleep yet.

Gu Fuzhou had asked him if he still only likes women. Lu Wancheng also asked him this question once before he died.

The two answers he gave were completely different. So, what did Gu Fuzhou think? He still remembered that the day after he married Lu Wancheng, Lu Wancheng kept saying that he wasn't gay. Later, he kept pestering him to be friends, insisting that they call each other brothers. Being a cut-sleeve, this kind of thing, has to be done together. If one person cuts and the other doesn't, it will only bring more troubles.

Lin Qingyu stayed lying down for a while before he tried getting up. He was lying on the inside of the bed and the way out was completely blocked by Gu Fuzhou, who was sleeping on the outside. If he wanted to get out, the only way was by stepping over Gu Fuzhou.

Gu Fuzhou was sound asleep. Usually, at this hour, the earth quaking and the mountains shaking couldn't get him to wake up. Lin Qingyu felt that he didn't have to worry about it but he still lightened his movements. Unexpectedly, just

as he was halfway over, Gu Fuzhou suddenly turned over, causing him to topple to a sit over Gu Fuzhou's waist.

Although Lin Qingyu was thin, he was an adult man nonetheless. The sudden force down, caused Gu Fuzhou to frown and he very reluctantly opened his eyes.

The moment Lin Qingyu locked eyes with him, for the first time in Lin Qingyu's life, he felt completely at a loss as to what to do. His current posture didn't seem right.

Lin Qingyu's hair was very long and seated over the man's waist, the blue silk of his hair cascaded over his shoulders, some strands falling to his chest. Gu

Fuzhou looked for a while but because he was too sleepy, he closed his eyes once again.

Lin Qingyu breathed a sigh of relief. He was about to resume his getting out of bed, when a pair of hands closed around his waist on either side.

Gu Fuzhou still had his eyes closed, his voice low and smiling, “Thinking of escaping?”

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “I want to get some water.”

Gu Fuzhou tried scaring him, “If you get up early on the first day of the new year, you will be forced to get up early throughout the rest of the year.”

Lin Qingyu laughed. “Waking up early is nothing to me – now let go. I’m really thirsty.”

Gu Fuzhou didn’t allow him to get up. He hugged him back and then stuffed him back into the quilt. Lin Qingyu saw that he was mouthing some words and when he looked closer, he found that he was actually counting down. “Five, four, three…”

When he reached “one”, Gu Fuzhou suddenly opened his eyes. He lifted the quilt and got out of bed, strode to the charcoal stove and quickly poured a cup of tea, bringing it immediately to Lin Qingyu. As soon as Lin Qingyu took the

tea cup, he burrowed back under the quilt. “It’s so cold, so cold. I’m going to freeze.”

The tea has been warmed on the charcoal stove and was slightly hot. Lin Qingyu sat on the bed, taking small sips. The dryness in his throat due to drinking the night before was quickly relieved.

Gu Fuzhou, wrapped in the quilt, watched the beauty drinking morning tea. He’d wanted to relieve himself last night but gave up the idea because it was too cold. It wasn’t much warmer in the wee hours of the morning than at night

but he was unexpectedly able to get himself up within ten seconds for Lin Qingyu, going to the other room to bring him back tea.

Gu Fuzhou couldn't help feeling emotional: Fuck, I really like him.

Lin Qingyu slowly finished his cup of tea. Gu Fuzhou took the empty cup and put it on the side of the bed. "Not that you're no longer thirsty, can you stay in bed with me?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Today's a rest day. No one's going to stop you from staying in bed. Why do you want to drag me along?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "It's boring by myself but with two of us, we can talk."

"What do you want to talk about?"

Gu Fuzhou thought about it and said, "Why don't we play Connect-the-words?"

Lin Qingyu glanced at him. "A game that Qinghe stopped playing when he was five? Are you sure you want to play that?"

"Oh, does Doctor Lin think my game too childish? Okay, then let's discuss how one becomes a true and proper wild king."

Lin Qingyu wondered, "Why would you want to be a true and proper wild

turtle?”

…

The two of them were nestled under the quilt, exchanging inconsequential chatter. In the blink of an eye, it was already three poles high in the sun. Save for when he was sick, Lin Qingyu had never gotten up so late. A rotten apple spoils the barrel. Being in close contact with this bag of lazybones for so long, even he couldn’t help being lazy occasionally.

However, he had to admit that having a lie-in with Gu Fuzhou in the middle of winter felt really good.

Gu Fuzhou had no parents and there no guests would come to the mansion on the first day of the new year. After freshening up, the two took their noon meal together. The servants who stayed in the mansion to celebrate the New Year came one after another to give their New Year’s greetings to the master, offering auspicious words. Lin Qingyu had Yuan Yin to take out the pre-prepared rewards and distributed them to the servants one by one. Among

them, Huan Tong and Hua Lu were undoubtedly the most rewarded, several times higher than the others.

When Huan Tong got the money gift, he beamed, “Thank you, Young Master. Thank you, General. I wish for the Young Master to have all your wishes come true. May the General grow younger with every passing year — Achoo.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Have you caught a cold?”

Huan Tong wiped his nose with the back of his finger and complained, “It’s been really cold these past couple days. It’s like an ice cellar under the quilts when I sleep.”

Gu Fuzhou’s tone was lazy. “It can’t be, it can’t be. There are actually still people without a wife to warm their bed in winter?”

Huan Tong: “…”

Lin Qingyu threw a look at Gu Fuzhou, signaling him to shut his mouth. He summoned Yuan Yin and said, “Make the arrangements. The amount of charcoal in each room is to be doubled during winter.”

After the crowd of servants dispersed, Gu Fuzhou took out a heavy purse. “Happy New Year, Qingyu. Here’s my money gift for you.”

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. “You’re younger than I am. Why are you giving me

New Year's money?"

Gu Fuzhou said, "In terms of physical age, I'm twelve years older than you. And in my hometown, the husband prepares New Year's money for his wife."

Lin Qingyu smiled. "Thank you."

Gu Fuzhou smiled as well. "I've given you my New Year's greetings. Would you like saying one back?"

"Alright." Lin Qingyu flicked his sleeves, put his hands in front of him, closed his eyes and bowed slightly to Gu Fuzhou, "First, a thousand years to langjun and second, to the qieshen, perpetual health."

Lin Qingyu's attitude was dignified and magnanimous, a graceful bearing befitting a learned scholar. In contrast, Gu Fuzhou immediately felt that his New Year's greeting just now felt like a child's playing house.

He knew this poem — and it was about a couple making a toast and exchanging wishes at a spring banquet—Lin Qingyu used it to pay his New Year's greetings to his husband.

Gu Fuzhou imitated Lin Qingyu's movements, bending over to return the salute, "Third, like the swallows perched on roof beams, may we see each other year after year."

News that Xiao Jie had been conferred the title of feudal king on New Year's

Eve didn't reach the General's mansion until that afternoon. Hearing that Xiao Jie was proclaimed 'King Ning', Gu Fuzhou said, "King Ning? Good choice. All throughout history, there has never been a King Ning who hasn't wanted to rise in revolt."

"Wrong." Lin Qingyu corrected him, "We don't want to rise in revolt; we want conspire against the state."

There was a difference between revolting and conspiring against the state. The former focused on military power, while the latter focused on strategy. Unless absolutely necessary, Lin Qingyu did not want to use the troops, nor did he want to seize the throne from the Xiao Clan. What he wanted was a change of rule in the palace. The country may have a ruler surnamed Xiao, but it will not be Xiao Cheng.

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "My wife is the only person who can use the words 'conspire against the state' in such an understated way."

On the second day of the new year, Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou stayed in the Lin Mansion. On the third day, Lin Qingyu was called by the emperor to the palace to diagnose his pulse.

In the palace, he happened to run into Xiao Jie, who had just finished offering his New Year's greetings to the emperor. Xiao Jie came out of the emperor's

chambers with an anxious look on his face. He was dressed in an azurite prince's robes, looking very preoccupied.

Lin Qingyu stopped to salute Xiao Jie, "Greetings to His Highness."

Xiao Jie smiled when he saw him, showing his fine white teeth. "It's Doctor Lin. Are you here to examine my Imperial Father?"

"Yes." Lin Qingyu said, "Congratulations to Your Highness. I heard that the prince was made feudal king. The General and I were looking for an auspicious day to visit the prince and offer our congratulations."

"Sigh, please don't mention this." Xiao Jie waved his hand, "This King Ning, feudal king matter is all nonsense."

Lin Qingyu asked knowingly, "Why do you say that?"

Xiao Jie grumbled, "My Imperial Father has no intention of letting me be an idle king. He's already given me an assignment!"

Lin Qingyu's lips curved slightly. "Is this not a good thing?"

"What about this is good? He asked me to go to the Ministry of Revenue and work with Nan'an Hou to raise funds for the provisions of the army in the Northwest for the coming year. But I don't know anything about all that! My

Imperial Father handed over that sort of thing to my older brother, the Crown Prince before. I don't know why he's suddenly throwing this to me."

"Your Highness, there is no need to worry." Lin Qingyu comforted, "I think Steward Xi may be able to share your worries for you."

Xiao Jie sighed. "I certainly hope so." Xiao Jie seemed to remember something and added, "By the way, Doctor Lin, A'Rong told me yesterday that you forgot to tell him the secret behind the tea. He was planning on going to the General's Mansion to ask Doctor Lin for it."

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "May I inconvenience Your Highness? Kindly tell him that I'll be waiting."

Chapter 75

It was another year past but the emperor's health remained the same. His headaches were at times, good and at times, bad. He was getting on in the years and after two years of being tossed about, he had drunk more medicine than tea. Recently, he had been forced by circumstances to sit in court and manage the government. His age showed, his temples were graying. Even when his headaches weren't flaring up, he wore a dispirited and dejected look.

The Emperor's health was of concern to the state and the entire country. Naturally, the slightest bit of carelessness could not be allowed. In addition to Lin Qingyu, Chu Zhengde and Lin Rushan also regularly took the emperor's pulse. In previous dynasties, there had been concubines who bribed the imperial physicians to try and assassinate the emperor. The emperor never trusted any single imperial physician. All of Lin Qingyu's prescriptions for the emperor were first reviewed by the Imperial Hospital and only after it has been confirmed to have no problems would it be used.

This was how it was for the emperor and the same went for the crown prince. It was a pity that their own bodies were not up to the mark. Despite being so carefully provided for, they have yet to show any major improvement.

On the fifth day of the New Year, Xi Rong, bringing gifts, visited the General's Mansion to pay his New Year's greetings. This time, he came alone. Xiao Jie now held the title of feudal king. If, like he had done so in the past, he appeared

as a guest at the General's Mansion, who knows how many censors' attention he would attract. Xiao Jie held Gu Fuzhou in great esteem and liked meeting with the beautiful doctor; though he wanted very much to come, Xi Rong would not let him.

Lin Qingyu did not care for Xiao Jie so long as Xi Rong came. This time, he invited Xi Rong to sit with him to drink tea and Xi Rong did not refuse.

Lin Qingyu said, "Did Steward Xi like the gift I gave to the prince?"

"If I didn't, how could I have come specially to the Mansion to thank you?"

Lin Qingyu said politely, "I thought Steward Xi was just here to pay his New Year's greetings."

"I'm curious. How did Madam get Nan'an Hou and the Empress to speak?" Xi Rong picked up the tea cup, took a sip and said with a smile, "This really is good tea."

"So long as the gift is delivered, why should Steward Xi concern himself where it came from?"

"I just wish to know. Can I take it that the Empress and Nan'an Hou are both on the side of the prince?"

Xi Rong was already speaking about it openly but Lin Qingyu refused to follow, saying only, "Steward Xi need only help the prince with all his heart so

that he may regain the Emperor's favor. Let other people worry about the rest of the people."

Xi Rong knew who this "other people" was. He could see that Lin Qingyu wanted to be the one to control the overall situation. He and Xiao Jie were undoubtedly nothing more than two pawns in his hand. After everything is done, whether these two pieces would be kept or discarded, no one knew.

Dealing with Lin Qingyu was tantamount to asking a tiger for its skin. But if he wanted to achieve his goals, he had no other way.

Besides, it was not yet certain who exactly was the tiger.

Xi Rong revealed a smile and said, "With Doctor Lin's words, His Highness and I can rest assured."

The two chatted for a while over tea. Finally, Xi Rong got up and took his leave. Before leaving, Xi Rong asked, "The General and his wife have given the prince such a great gift. I'm afraid the return gift I brought today is far from enough. I do not know what the General is asking for, whether it is soldiers or

power? I ask that the Madam inform me so that His Highness might make good on his promise in the future."

Lin Qingyu said, "There is no need to worry, Steward Xi. All the General wants is to be a wealthy idler who no one dares to mess with."

"What about you, Madam?"

"Me?" Lin Qingyu hadn't thought about this question yet. He had done so much, in large part out of self-preservation. If Xiao Cheng and the emperor hadn't coveted him, if they hadn't pressed Gu Fuzhou at every step, he probably wouldn't have gone this far.

When all was done, Gu Fuzhou could realize his dream of being a salted fish until his dying day. Even realizing his dream of being a eunuch wouldn't be impossible. But what about him, what did he want?

Thinking of the "Spring Banquet" greetings they'd exchanged on the first day of the new year, Lin Qingyu quickly had his answer. "Firstly, I want to study medicine without any distractions. Secondly… I want to always be with the General."

Conspiring against the state was a grave crime punishable with the death of an entire clan. Gu Fuzhou and Lin Qingyu taking such a big risk and putting so much thought into this made Xi Rong think they wanted half the power of the Xiao Clan. Normally, he would only think that Lin Qingyu was merely being

perfunctory with him, using such polite words. But when he saw the inadvertent warmth in Lin Qingyu's cold eyes, he actually believed it a little.

Xi Rong said doubtfully, "Is it that simple?"

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "It's that simple."

After seeing Xi Rong off, Lin Qingyu called out "Huan Tong", but it was Hua Lu who came. Lin Qingyu asked her to go to the kitchen to pass on a message. A sheep was to be slaughtered and they were to prepare fine mutton slices. The General wanted to eat mutton hot pot tonight. Gu Fuzhou mad mentioned it before going to bed last night and he remembered. Mutton was a great

supplement, it could invigorate and benefit one's qi. It was very suitable for eating in winter.

Hua Lu replied, "Yes". Lin Qingyu asked casually, "Where's Huan Tong?"

Hua Lu said: "Huan Tong's cold has gotten worse and he's been resting in his room since this morning."

Lin Qingyu's brows furrowed slightly. "If it's a cold, why didn't he come and see me?"

"Who knows?" Hua Lu shrugged, "He probably doesn't want to trouble the Young Master."

Lin Qingyu found Huan Tong in the wing-room. A servant like him, a page boy who closely served the master, lived very close to the main house. Lin Qingyu didn't treat Huan Tong like he treated the other servants. The general's house had few masters and many rooms; there was no need for Huan Tong to room with the other servants.

Lin Qingyu knocked on the door. When he heard a "come in", he pushed open the door and went in. Huan Tong was lying on the bed. Seeing that it was the Young Master who had dome, he hurriedly made the get up but who knows

where the wound was, his face twisted and he cried piteously, “You-Young Master.”

“Don’t move.” Lin Qingyu walked to the bed and put the back of his hand against Huan Tong’s forehead to check his temperature, “This isn’t a cold. What’s wrong with you?”

Huan Tong’s face flushed red and he stammered, “I accidentally fell and hurt myself.”

“Then why did you say it was a cold?” Lin Qingyu said coldly, “Have you learned to lie to me?”

“No!” Huan Tong knew that he couldn’t hide it from the Young Master. He endured the pain and said, “It happened yesterday when I was in the kitchen. I was careless and got kicked by a sheep…”

“Where did you get kicked?”

Huan Tong looked down sadly. Lin Qingyu understood and couldn’t help laughing. “Does it hurt?”

Huan Tong nodded. “It hurts so much. I thought I was going to die.”

For ordinary men, this truly was unbearable pain. “Take off your pants and I’ll

have a look."

Huan Tong has followed Lin Qingyu since he was a child. It stood to reason that he had nothing to be ashamed of in front of him. But in Huan Tong's eyes, the Young Master was like an immortal. He didn't want the Young Master to see unclean things and so he hesitated to move. In the end, Lin Qingyu's threw him a cold look and he took off his pants.

Lin Qingyu used a clean wooden stick to push it aside, touching it a little. Huan Tong hissed, taking in a sharp breath. His legs were shaking non-stop. He was really in pain.

The sheep had kicked quite hard and the wound was red and swollen. Medicine needed to be used.

While looking at it, Lin Qingyu's heart was as calm as still water. Sure enough, other people's bodies were nothing but lumps of flesh to him. Only Gu Fuzhou's body could make his hand feel rotten.

"I'll have someone deliver the medicine to you. After applying it for a few days, the swelling should go down." Lin Qingyu looked out the window, "What time is it?"

Huan Tong said, "It should almost be Shenshi."

It was still too early for Gu Fuzhou to return to the Mansion. Lin Qingyu thought about it and ordered Yuan Yin to prepare the carriage. Yuan Yin asked,

“Is Madam going to the Imperial Medical Office?”

“No, I’m going to the military camp.”

The capital’s military camp of the capital was located ten li away from the city. It was a camp for cavalry that protected the safety of the capital. Gu Fuzhou worked miracles maneuvering troops but he refused to step foot on the battlefield. The emperor then asked him to oversee the drills of the cavalry, making the best use of him while he was in the capital.

It was the first time for Lin Qingyu to come to the camp. As soon as he got off the carriage, he felt sharp eyes cast their eyes towards him. A guard with a sword barred his way. “Who is it?”

The groom said, “This is the General’s wife.”

“Wife?” The guard looked Lin Qingyu up and down. He’d heard that the General’s wife was a beauty and the man in front of him was indeed every inch a beauty. The carriage he rode in on was also the carriage of the General’s Mansion. The guards were well-trained and even though he knew that this

was the General's wife, he still handled matters according to the rules. "I will have to ask the Madam to undergo facial recognition first."

"Facial recognition?" Lin Qingyu wondered, "What is that?"

"Oh, uh, only those who look familiar to us can enter. New faces must register first and then report to the General."

While Lin Qingyu was registering, someone had already notified Gu Fuzhou. As soon as he put down the brush, he heard a familiar voice. "Qingyu."

Gu Fuzhou in the barracks is completely different from Gu Fuzhou at home. His long hair was tied up, not a single strand left loose. His outline looked as though it had been carved; his figure tall and straight. He he walked towards him in large strides, his dark red cape fluttered behind him.

Gu Fuzhou stood in front of Lin Qingyu, looking down at him. "Why did you suddenly come?"

Lin Qingyu knew that Gu Fuzhou had to put on an act while in the capital's military camp. "I'm here to take the general home."

If they were at home, Gu Fuzhou would already be smiling so wide, the corners of his lips would be sent flying. But at this time, he did not have much

of a reaction, only his eyes held a smile. “I still have an hour to go before I can leave. You can accompany me until then.”

Lin Qingyu followed Gu Fuzhou into the camp. His temperament was cold but his appearance was bright and handsome. This contrast created an irresistible attraction and he created a strong sense of presence no matter where he went. Most of the men in the barracks big, burly and rough fellows. Where would they ordinarily be able to see such a beauty? Everyone wanted a second look but they revered general and in turn, they held the General’s wife in awe as well. They all firmly restrained themselves from staring.

Gu Fuzhou brought Lin Qingyu into his tent and after waving the others away, he immediately revealed his original form. He took Lin Qingyu’s hand and sat down, saying with a smile, “What a wonderful day today is! Doctor Lin actually

came to pick me up from work. Could it be that you came here to check up on me?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Huan Tong was kicked by a sheep and I thought of you."

"Huh? How are these two things connected?" Gu Fuzhou asked, puzzled, "I have never been kicked by a sheep."

Lin Qingyu smiled and said nothing. He looked around the tent and saw that it looked very prim and proper. He asked, "What do you normally do here?"

"Feed the horse, lift weights, sleep."

Lin Qingyu understood, "In short, skipping out on work."

"You can't say that." Gu Fuzhou played absent-mindedly with the fur collar of Lin Qingyu's marten coat, "I have also made great contributions to this cavalry camp."

"For example?"

"I invigorate and boost the morale of the soldiers. I a bright beacon when the soldiers are in low spirits." Gu Fuzhou stood with his hands behind his back, a serious expression on his face, "Only by training to your utmost can His Majesty sit on the dragon throne in greater comfort; only by taking less of the provisions can the imperial concubines' headdresses be made even more resplendent. The road is long and winding but the men of our Dayu is never

afraid of hardship, never afraid of weariness. By giving yourself a chance, you give the Dayu a chance. A person's life is but the glimpse a white horse through a chink in the wall. Laziness in one's youth spells regret in old age. Everyone wants to be idl but it is only through exerting oneself that someone, one will overcome indolence. There is nothing a determined person cannot accomplish…"

"You're making them do what you yourself can't." Lin Qingyu spoke for the many soldiers who admired Gu Fuzhou, "You despicable stranger."

"It can't be helped. Who made it so that hot-blooded men loved hearing stuff like this?" Gu Fuzhou had said a lot and was now feeling a little thirsty. There

were no tea sets in the barracks, only waterskins. Gu Fuzhou opened the waterskin and took a sip. He asked Lin Qingyu, “Do you want a drink?”

Lin Qingyu took the waterskin. He then took out a handkerchief and wiped the mouth of the bag. He was about o drink when Gu Fuzhou took it back.

Lin Qingyu threw him a puzzled look. Gu Fuzhou raised his head and took another sip. He then stuffed the waterskin into Lin Qingyu’s hand and said, “Drink.”

Lin Qingyu stared at the mouth of the waterskin and at an angle that Gu Fuzhou couldn’t see, his lips curved. “It seems like I’m not thirsty anymore.”

“Does Doctor Lin not even want to touch this general’s mouth indirectly?” Gu Fuzhou sneered coldly, “Why, afraid it would ruin your mouth?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “A little bit.”

Gu Fuzhou laughed angrily. For the first time, he showed his domineering side in front of Lin Qingyu. “Today you must drink this water, Lin Qingyu. Else, you can’t leave.”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyelashes. “If I want to leave, will the General stop me?”

Gu Fuzhou raised his hand, but before Lin Qingyu could react, the man took off his hairpin. Outside, were people from the cavalry, Lin Qingyu naturally

couldn't go out with his hair down.

Gu Fuzhou twirled the hairpin between his fingers and then held it firmly in the palm of his hand. "I'll return it to you after you drink."

Lin Qingyu looked at Gu Fuzhou. "Why do you like taking people's hairpins so much—is this a habit you developed in your hometown?"

"It's a habit I developed on you." Gu Fuzhou said coolly, "If I touch you anywhere else, I'm afraid you'd call me a lecher so the only thing I can take advantage of is your hair."

So long as it's not a habit he's developed on other girls. Lin Qingyu took the waterskin, raised his head and took a sip. He asked, "Are you satisfied?" He didn't even know what indirect touch meant.

Gu Fuzhou was satisfied but also not completely. He said with a not-quite smile. "Unexpectedly, Doctor Lin still dislikes me."

Lin Qingyu comforted him, "I don't dislike you. I was joking with you."

"Really?"

"If I dislike you, would I still let you in my bed?

Gu Fuzhou was finally persuaded. He helped Lin Qingyu re-tie his hair. "Doctor Lin has now also learned to joke." He asked pointedly, "Who did you

learn it from?"

Lin Qingyu didn't give the answer Gu Fuzhou wanted to hear. "Naturally, I learned from Huan Tong. Huan Tong loves to joke. It's not like the General doesn't know."

Gu Fuzhou laughed softly and said, "Did you really come here to pick your husband up from work, Doctor Lin? Or to infuriate him to death in the military camp?"

When the time came, the two of them went home together. In the carriage, Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou talked about Xi Rong's visit. Gu Fuzhou concluded, "Now, we have the Empress in the inner palace, the Nan'an Hou among the civil servants, a lot of generals among the military and even Xi Rong and Xiao

Jie have climbed on board. It could be said that all is at the ready, all that is needed is an east wind."

Lin Qingyu added, "The Emperor has me by his side."

Gu Fuzhou understood what Lin Qingyu meant and reminded him, "You are not the only imperial physician by the emperor's side. And the others are no vegetarians."

Lin Qingyu said, "If I want to lay a hand on the Emperor, I won't be doing so through his medication."

Gu Fuzhou recalled what Lin Qingyu had been working on during this period. "You're thinking of using Gu?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Chu Zhengde only knows a thing or two about Gu. If a strange Gu were to be planted in the emperor's body, he might not become aware of it."

Gu Fuzhou thought for a while, and said, "I think the key lies in Xiao Cheng."

"Why?"

"As long as Xiao Cheng proves unworthy of being crown price, even if you don't use a Gu on the Emperor, the Emperor would depose him."

The author has something to say: Indirect kiss, dame!

77

Chapter 76

Gu Fuzhou meant for the emperor to take the initiative to abolish Xiao Chen's position as crown prince. This was easier said than done. For decades after he ascended to the throne, the emperor had refused to name a successor. They said he was being cautious, but in fact, he had been creating a Gu. He turned a blind eye to the battle of the princes in order to wait for the final winner.

Four years ago, Xiao Cheng stood out from amongst the princes, proving to the emperor that there was no better choice for crown prince. For this reason, all the other princes had died or had been laid to waste. In the end, the only ones left were an idiot and a dullard. The price of the battle for succession was so great that the Xiao Clan could no afford another one anytime soon. Even if Xiao Cheng has been remiss in his official duties as of late, even if Xiao Jie were able to come out with remarkable achievements, the emperor would not change the crown prince.

Unless, Xiao Cheng were to do something that the emperor simply could never tolerate. Even if Xiao Cheng were to defile the harem, the emperor might still protect him; only grave crimes such as attempting regicide and treason, collaborating with the enemy and betraying the country, would be able to shake his position as heir.

But even though Xiao Cheng was devoting himself to the search for Shen Huaishi, it wasn't to the point that he had completely lost all sense of

rationality. Shen Huaishi had merely turned him from a smart person into an ordinary one. He knew that so long as he didn't make any grave mistakes, sooner or later the country would belong to him. Therefore, how could he go attempting regicide and treason or collaborating with the enemy and betraying the country?

Lin Qingyu expressed his doubts, and Gu Fuzhou said, "Do you remember the six names I wrote down?"

"I remember. Xiao Cheng, Shen Huaishi; Xiao Jie, Xi Rong; Xiao Li, the Empress."

"They are each other's weaknesses and if you want to do something to one of them, the best breakthrough point is in the other person — this is the general principle of the entire book, Huai's Refusal of the Monarch". Gu Fuzhou said, "With this principle, it is not difficult for us to see that if we want Xiao Cheng to do something crazy, it will have to be through Shen Huaishi."

Lin Qingyu pondered, "You're right, but right now no one knows Shen Huaishi's whereabouts."

Gu Fuzhou said unhurriedly, "Don't worry, in the time it takes for a song to be played, I'll have thought of a way."

Lin Qingyu sneered lightly, "You're overestimating your own capabilities." No matter how smart Gu Fuzhou was, it was impossible for him to come up with a comprehensive solution in such a short period of time. He thought that it

would take Gu Fuzhou at least two or three days to give him an answer. But who could have guessed that after they alighted from the carriage, Gu Fuzhou said, “Didn’t you tell Xiao Cheng before that Shen Huaishi might have escaped to the north?”

“En.” The Northern Border was located in the extreme north of the Dayu and the King of the Northern Border was the only king of the Dayu from a different clan. Before Princess Jingchun was married to him, he was said to be hidden danger to the court. Even now, the emperor was very guarded towards the king of the Northern Border. He made Xiao Cheng think that Shen Huaishi might be in the north, so naturally, Xiao Cheng dispatched a lot of people to look there. Batch after batch of the crown prince’s trusted men were sent to the north, allegedly to catch the assassin. But the frequency of the dispatches and the attention the crown prince gave to this matter drew tha dissatisfaction of the emperor. It had even begun to draw suspicion.

Lin Qingyu had said this before to plant a seed of doubt in the emperor’s heart. As for whether this seed could grow, he was not completely sure.

Thinking of this, Lin Qingyu vaguely guessed Gu Fuzhou’s intentions. “You want to make use of the Northern Border…? But since marrying the Princess Jingchun, the relationship between the Northern Border and the capital can be

described as that of brotherly friendship and respect. It's impossible for the the King of the Northern Border to rebel at this time; he has no reason to."

Gu Fuzhou only said, "Later, call Zhang Shiquan over. Have him handle one matter."

After Lin Qingyu used the matter of the illegal salt business to coerce the Nan'an Hou into submission, naturally, Zhang Shiquan could no longer stay in the Hou Mansion. Zhang Shiquan was thorough, reliable and loyal to him. Lin Qingyu invited him to the General's mansion and had him continue looking after the household's accounts for him.

"What matter?"

"Have him find people he can trust and rely on in the Northern Border. Have them spread two rumors; one true and one false."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What's the true rumor and what's the false one?"

"The false rumor is, of course, that the King of the Northern Border is amassing his own troops. Obviously, he now harbors thoughts of disloyalty

towards the Emperor. He wants to lead his troops south and take the capital directly."

Lin Qingyu disapproved, "A rumor like that can only ever be what it is, a rumor. Even if it reaches the Emperor's ears, the Emperor will only be a little suspicious."

"You listen to me first and let me tell you the true one."

Lin Qingyu reined in his temper and said, "Say it."

Gu Fuzhou had a smile on his lips, looking like he was in for a good show. "The reason why the King of the Northern Border is going to revolt is because the Princess Jingchun, the bride given to him by the Imperial court four years ago, is a man."

Lin Qingyu was stunned. "—What?"

A cold and great beauty making absolutely no attempt to hide his utmost shock held a kind of cuteness that can rarely be beheld. His eyes, like autumn waters, were wide open and his red lips were slightly parted, making Gu Fuzhou want to kiss him.

"Jingchun was mistaken for a palace maid when he first entered the palace. Under Xiao Cheng's protection, her identity had never been revealed. Only Xiao Cheng and Shen Huaishi know his secret. Of course, we, the vast collection of readers, know too." Gu Fuzhou tirelessly talked on, "Later, the

King of the Northern Realm fell in love with him at first sight and wanted to marry him, to him his queen. His desperate unwillingness to consent to the marriage was because he was afraid he would be exposed and killed."

Lin Qingyu had never heard such an outrageous thing. "A palace maid is actually a man? How can this matter be kept secret for so many years? IS the rest of the palace stupid?"

Gu Fuzhou shrugged. "Don't ask. It was what the plot needed."

Lin Qingyu was still in disbelief. "The King of the Northern Border must have found out long before. Why has he made no movement at all?"

"Calculating the timeline, the King of the Northern Border should have known about Jingchun during the second year of their marriage. But by then, he had already fallen in love with Jingchun and quite deeply. What can he do? Of course, he chose to forgive. For the sake of the overall situation, the King of the Northern Border, told no one about this and Jingchun continued to dress in women's clothing."

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but say, "He didn't find out until the next year? Didn't they share a bridal chamber?"

"Whoever said that you had to have a bridal chamber right after you're married?" Gu Fuzhou said sourly, "We've been married twice; we've never had

a bridal chamber. The King of the Northern Border is an upright gentleman and he would not engage in loveless lovemaking."

After Gu Fuzhou said this, Lin Qingyu suddenly felt that this story was not too outrageous. Jingchun, the bride they had given for a marriage to strengthen their relations, was actually a man. This was indeed reason enough for the King of the Northern Border to raise troops to rebel. Even if the King of the Northern Border had no intention of rebelling, after learning of this matter, the court would think he would. In this way, the doubts he had planted in the emperor's heart could be used to the greatest effect.

Lin Qingyu pondered for a long time and suddenly asked, "If you already knew about this early on, why are you only telling me now?"

Gu Fuzhou was completely unaware that he had committed any wrong. Without any change in his expression, he said, "As they say, 'mountains multiply, streams double back and doubts leave no path; through dark willows and blooming flowers, yonder lies another hamlet.' This kind of thing must only be used at the appropriate time, only then would it be meaningful. Making you doubt life before finally seeing the light; realizing that the future is a resplendent scene of light! You have absolutely no idea how adorable your

expression was just now." Gu Fuzhou looked as though he were savoring a pleasant taste. "That is a sight I will probably only see once in my lifetime."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"Also, who said that no one knows where Shen Huaishi is?" Gu Fuzhou gave a little wicked laugh, "I know. It was written in the original book where Shen Huaishi went after leaving the capital. Although there may have been changes since we started intervening in the plot, but as long as you follow that route, you should be able to find clues."

Lin Qingyu sneered again and again: "Do you think you are very powerful, do you want me to give you a prize?"

Gu Fuzhou realized that something was not right, and blinked his eyes: "Huh?"

Not only had Gu Fuzhou not come forth with information about important clues but he was even putting on airs in front of him. Lin Qingyu was so angry that he wanted to poison him. Miffed about having taken to long and now he has missed his chance, Lin Qingyu simply ignored Gu Fuzhou.

Gu Fuzhou was now deeply aware of his own mistake. He proffered a birch and asked for a flogging; he knelt by his bedside that night and told Lin Qingyu every little detail he could remember from Huai's Refusal of the

Monarch; not leaving out even the details of Xiao Cheng and Shen Huaishi's first time in bed after they managed to make up.

His excited retelling was coldly interrupted by Lin Qingyu. "Why do you remember these plots so clearly?"

Gu Fuzhou sighed innocently, "It's not like I want to, but the author's writing was so detailed, so exaggerated. It left a huge shadow on my heart. You know, at seventeen, I wasn't all that clear on how two men did it. But the author spent several thousand words eloquently describing how Xiao Cheng found a good jade ball, matching it with his own twin dragons plunging into the sea. My expression at the time was like this –" Gu Fuzhou picked up a book and his facial features wrinkled together, vividly reconstructing the situation at the time. "Is this alright? That can't go in. No matter how I think about it, that just won't go in."

A vein popped on Lin Qingyu's forehead. "…Enough, shut up."

After that, Lin Qingyu dispatched Zhang Shiquan to the Northern Border. Meanwhile, Gu Fuzhou picked out a few capable soldiers from his own

personal guard and following the route he had planned, went to seek out Shen Huaishi's whereabouts.

In the blink of an eye, it was the fourteenth day of the first lunar month and tomorrow was the Lantern Festival.

The annual Lantern Festival was the liveliest time of year in the capital. Usually there was a curfew in the capital. People weren't allowed to go out after dark. But during the Lantern Festival, the curfew in the capital was temporarily relaxed for the evening festivities.

Gu Fuzhou has been in the Dayu for two years but had yet to celebrate the Lantern Festival. "I heard that for you, the Lantern Festival is equivalent to a carnival. Is this true?"

"A carnival?" Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, "You could say that."

It was the night of the Lantern Festival. In the Dayu, groups roaming around to admire the lanterns was very popular. It was night and the capital was a sea of lights. Poetry riddles were written on lanterns, all sorts of performances were being put on show and women all travelled around in groups. The tip of the willow reaches the moon and lovers meet at nightfall. Young ladies from well-off families are only able to go out during the Lantern Festival to meet up with the men they like.

Hearing that last sentence, Gu Fuzhou was slightly surprised. "Really? I thought that you people of the Dayu don't date at all before marriage. I

thought all matters regarding the marriage are decided by your parents."

Lin Qingyu's heart moved. He asked, "What does ' dating ' mean?"

Gu Fuzhou explained to him patiently, even telling him the story behind this word. "Look at the big boats in the canal. They're all dragging along small boats. Once they get near the shore, the big boats will create a deep draught, making it is difficult to pull in to shore. At this time, it's the small boat that can unload and go ashore. In this way, they rely on each other to go back and forth. So in my hometown, 'dating' refers to when two people fall in love and begin to rely on each other, making them loathe to be apart. To explain it in your words, it probably means holding someone's hand and growing old together."

Lin Qingyu said slowly, "So, 'dating' also means a pledge of one's love?"

"You can understand it to be like that."

Lin Qingyu looked at him meaningfully, "Oh."

The author has something to say: Salted fish reading the original book: Grandpa in the subway looking at his mobile phone.jpg

78

Chapter 77

On the fifteenth day of the first month of the lunar year, there was a chill in the spring air but the sunlight beaming down was warm. It was still far too early for lantern fair but the shops along Yongxing Street have already hung their signboard high above their door; lanterns are hung under their eaves and various supports for the decorative lanterns have been set up above the lintel of their doors. Though it didn't look like much in daytime but come nightfall when the streets will be teeming with people; the lanterns all lit up; with fiery trees and silver flowers and banners flying in the wind — oh, it will truly be a magnificent sight to behold.

It was a time of celebration for the common people and it was also a time when the defenses of the city were on high alert. The cavalry camp was extremely busy preparing for the Lantern Festival. Although there was no need for General Gu to do much of anything, he still needed to show his face and go through the motions. Gu Fuzhou struggled to get up early that morning and then headed to the military camp after having his morning meal. Lin Qingyu

didn't need to go to the palace today and he had no plans to go to the Imperial Medical Office.

At noon, Hua Lu served Lin Qingyu his noon time meal. She prepared bowl of milky white fish soup and handed it to Lin Qingyu. Faced filled with anticipation, "Young Master, are you going to the Lantern Festival tonight?"

Lin Qingyu always preferred quiet and the Lantern Festival was sure to be crowded with people. Though he had grown up in the capital, the number of times he'd gone to the Lantern Festival could be counted on one hand. As an adult, he had never gone even once. "Do you want to go?"

Hua Lu nodded excitedly: "The last time I went to the Lantern Festival was several years ago. I still remember that there were so many people and the Jinshui River was filled with lotus lanterns. After that, I was sent to Nan'an Hou Mansion to serve Young Master Hou. I never got the chance to go

again…" Hua Lu realized that she had said the wrong thing and quickly closed her mouth.

Lin Qingyu took a mouthful of fish soup and said, "Then, you should think carefully on what you're going to wear tonight."

Hua Lu's eyes lit up: "Will you take me to go, Young Master?"

"En." Lin Qingyu looked at the delighted girl, "Go and get ready."

Gu Fuzhou had asked a lot about the customs of the Lantern Festival. He probably wanted to go to Yongxing Street to join in the fun. He knew that Gu

Fuzhou liked appearing handsome so he specially ordered the servants to iron a few newly sewn robes for him to choose from.

Gu Fuzhou did not return to the mansion until dusk. When Lin Qingyu heard he had arrived, he went to see him nad saw him paralyzed on the bed, like a sun-dried salted fish.

Lin Qingyu was all too familiar with this state of affairs. “Tired?”

Gu Fuzhou said weakly: “Wa-water…”

Lin Qingyu knew that he was just putting on an act but he still poured a cup of tea for Gu Fuzhou and put it to his mouth. Gu Fuzhou drank the tea in one go and said, “Can you believe that I hadn’t loafed on the job all day today?”

“Well, why didn’t you?”

“The capital’s defenses are full of holes. I couldn’t bear it and offered a little advice. The people from the Wu Mansion took it as a signal to pester me the whole day.” Gu Fuzhou regretted his actions. “I could have come back to have the noontime meal with you.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Looking at you, you don’t seem to have the energy to go to the Lantern Festival.”

Gu Fuzhou was still very interested in the Dayu’s Lantern Festival, but he knew that Lin Qingyu didn’t like the bustle and excitements. And so he said,

“Yeah, there’s so many people outside, going out would be exhausting. Ican lie down and imagine myself going out and seeing the Lantern Festival.”

“Alright, then you can imagine about it at home. I’ll be taking Huan Tong and Hua Lu to see the lights.”

“Huh?” Gu Fuzhou propped his body up with one hand, “You’re going?”

Lin Qingyu said, “I promised Hua Lu that I would take her.”

Gu Fuzhou gave a slow “oh”. “Then I’ll go with you.”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. “Aren’t you tired?”

Gu Fuzhou sighed, “It can’t be helped. The wife wants to take a stroll around town. No matter how tired I am I must accompany him and do so with pleasure.”

When it was almost time and the two of them got changed. Lin Qingyu’s long hair was tied up with a jade crown. He was dressed in white with a hooded snow cape draped around his shoulders. Seeing Gu Fuzhou’s girdled robe, still dressed as a warrior, he couldn’t help but ask, “Don’t you like wearing red?”

When Gu Fuzhou was still Lu Wancheng, he preferred brocade robes. Lu Wancheng had the temperament of a noble and fiery red suited him best. Now,

he was a lot more tanned; whenever he was not smiling, he appeared quite fierce, his expression stern.

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “Lu Wancheng was young and he looked good in red. Red is a lovely, delicate color and I’m a lot older. The most important thing when it comes to styling is choosing clothes that suit you.” After speaking, he thought back longingly towards the past, “When I still had my original body, I looked good in everything.”

Lin Qingyu snorted disdainfully. Gu Fuzhou took it as disbelief and said, “It’s true, you could give me just a rag and I’d still look good.”

I’ve seen you before. Lin Qingyu deliberately said in revenge to Gu Fuzhou’s over exaggeration, “I can only say that your original body was not my type.”

Gu Fuzhou was not fooled. “Oh, and who said in a dream that I was better-looking than Lu Wancheng?”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “You said it yourself.”

The two left the mansion with Huan Tong and Hua Lu. It was only halfway into the night but the market was already full of people. Walking along the streets were both ordinary people as well as high-ranking people, men and women, old and young. There were even quite a few foreigners. With the sky having gone completely dark, all the lights were now on. The brilliant lanterns

cast a crimson shades on the faces of revelers, wasting whatever money the girls' spent on rouge.

They continued walking. Hawkers were calling out from all sides. Huan Tong and Hua Lu were both very vivacious and after an hour of walking, their stomachs were already stuffed with all sorts of snacks.

Huan Tong was eating happily when he suddenly pointed towards the horizon. "Young Master, General, look!"

Hundreds upon hundreds of Kongming lanterns slowly rose into the sky from the direction of Changsheng Temple, lighting up the night sky. Hua Lu looked up, the lights in the sky reflected in her eyes. "It's so beautiful…"

Gu Fuzhou said, "Looking at it from here leaves something to be desired. Qingyu, where's the best place for admiring the moon in the capital?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "That should be above the gate tower in the palace."

The gate tower could only be accessed from inside the palace so Gu Fuzhou had no choice but to give up. At this time, they were not far from the palace and Gu Fuzhou was a lot taller than most of the people on the street. His eyes

crossed the sea of people, towards the lone person up on the tower, his four-toed claw python robe was blowing vividly in the wind. .

It was the Lantern Festival with thousands of sparkling lights; what was this person thinking?

Gu Fuzhou retracted his gaze and suddenly felt something bump into him. He looked down and saw that it was a little girl with a flower basket. Gu Fuzhou had a strong physique and the little girl reeled back after bumping into him. Fortunately, Gu Fuzhou was very quick and he reached out and steadied her.

Her flower basket fell to the ground, the flowers stepped on by revelers. The little girl's mouth flattened and she looked as though she were about to burst into tears. Lin Qingyu motioned for Hua Lu to coax the child but Gu Fuzhou already crouched down He smiled and with just a few words, managed to coax the little girl. When the little girl laughed through her tears, her mother

appeared. It turned out that the mother and daughter pair had come to sell flowers.

Gu Fuzhou bought all the flowers from the little girl's mother, turned around and said, "Qingyu, these are for you."

Before Lin Qingyu could react, a large bouquet of flowers was stuffed into his arms. "Why are you giving me flowers?"

Flowers in full bloom, brilliant as brocade; gorgeous in many forms, yet only a foil for the beauty that transcends flowers.

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu with a light in his eyes. "Jiangnan has nothing but this sprig of spring I give to you." – Sigh, it's a good thing I memorized a lot of poems, otherwise I wouldn't be able to keep up a conversation with you."

Lin Qingyu lowered his head and smelled the fragrance of the flowers. "You don't have to recite poems. You can speak as you are used to. I can understand you even in your native dialect."

"Oh, then the reason I'm giving you flowers if because…"

At this time, the parade lantern float came ambling along, nearly filling the entire street. The woman atop the float, with a veil covering her face, was dancing gracefully. Her clothes exuded a fragrance, attracting countless merry-makers to stop and watch. However, in the blink of an eye, the four of them

were swept away by the crowd. Lin Qingyu and Huan Tong were together but they had no idea whether the other two went.

Lin Qingyu wasn't worried. Gu Fuzhou was tall and easy to spot. And even if they couldn't find them, they could just go back to the carriage and wait.

It was inconvenient lugging along this large bouquet of flowers, so Lin Qingyu handed the flowers to Huan Tong and asked him to bring them to the carriage first. After Huan Tong left, he shuttled through the crowd alone, keeping a look out for the others while admiring the lights.

The lanterns were still there, sparkling lights were everywhere. It was the same scene as before but Lin Qingyu now found it dull and boring. After some time, he stopped appreciating the lights and just looked for the others. However,

there were simply too many revelers, with all of the bustling about, faces passed by before his eyes but none of them was of the person he wanted.

Lin Qingyu now felt unreasonably impatient. He was thinking about whether to go back to the carriage and wait when he suddenly heard someone call his name.

“Qingyu.”

Lin Qingyu followed the voice and saw Gu Fuzhou, by the banks of the Jinshui River, looking at him underneath a lighted tree.

His eyes were bright, thousands of emotions held within them.

This guy… liked him.

——Gu Fuzhou liked him.

A great heat appeared in Lin Qingyu’s chest and his heart was beating like a drum. He didn’t have heart palpitations so why was his heart beating so fast just because of this one person?

Without knowing it, he stepped out, through the crowded sea of people. Just as he was about to reach that person, there came a shove behind him, making him

unsteady on his feet—

He stumbled into Gu Fuzhou's arms.

Gu Fuzhou steadied him with a hesitant touch on his waist. He said with a smile, "Doctor Lin, what are you running for?"

Lin Qingyu was momentarily stunned. Had he been running? He hadn't realized.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help letting his lips curve. He smiled, "I was going to you. Of course, I had to run."

Gu Fuzhou was stunned. He was no longer hesitant as he firmly held the waist of the person in his arms.

Hua Lu's voice came at this time. "General, have you found the Young Master?"

"I found him." Gu Fuzhou let go of Lin Qingyu and said, sounding like his usual self, "Where's Huan Tong?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I asked him to go back to the carriage first."

Gu Fuzhou asked Hua Lu to go back and inform Huan Tong, lest he wait anxiously. As soon as Hua Lu left, only the two of them were left.

The two stared at each other for a while, seeming a little embarrassed. In the

end, it was Gu Fuzhou who spoke first, “Qingyu, do you want to go for a walk by the river?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Okay.”

The bright moon hung high above; countless boats floated on the river and lotus lanterns decorate the water surface creating a galaxy of stars. Gu Fuzhou usually talked a lot, but now he was quiet. Lin Qingyu walked beside him, not knowing what to say.

When they went out for the evening, their conversations flowed naturally but now they felt awkward.

After an unknown length of time, Gu Fuzhou coughed and said, “The bright moon is out tonight and shines upon your beauty…”

As soon as he opened his mouth, Lin Qingyu stopped.

“Your slender and graceful figure, touching my trouble heart…” Gu Fuzhou paused, his face changed. “Uh, what was it that came after?”

Shit, he forgot his words.

The lanterns illuminated the sky like daytime. They could hear the faint melody of a flute. They crowd of people surged and all around them, talking and laughing. Lin Qingyu looked at him quietly; his long eyelashes couldn’t

cover the glittering pools of his eyes. The surrounding scenery seemed to fade like an illusion.

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu for a long time. He lowered his eyes and chuckled as though laughing at himself. At the same time, it seemed to relieve his nervousness. “I’m sorry, Qingyu. The Book of Songs is too difficult to memorize. At the time, I only memorized a few and I’ve forgotten a lot of them now. Can I change the lines of the poem? Hmmm… the mountains have trees and the trees have branches…”

“I like you too.” Lin Qingyu used the words of Gu Fuzhou’s hometown, “Would you like to date me?”

Chapter 78

An hour later, the two returned to the carriage. They saw Huan Tong and Hua Lu sitting outside the carriage, sitting shoulder to shoulder. Huan Tong was shouting excitedly, pointing at the fireworks blooming in the night sky. Hua Lu had her face in her hands, quietly admiring the beautiful scenery. Despite how enchanted she was, she still didn't forget to think it would be good if Young Master Hou could see the magnificence of the Lantern Festival up in Heaven.

One was still and the other active. Huan Tong, who was noisy and shouting, no longer looked so steady in comparison. Huan Tong was a year younger than Lin Qingyu and he too was almost at weak crown. Gu Fuzhou and Huan Tong were of the same age and although there were a lot of times when Gu Fuzhou acted strange, he would never be careless when the situation called for him to be calm.

Just like now; the two of them had just expressed their affection for each other but Gu Fuzhou didn't seem to be too excited and he didn't talk much the entire way. If he hadn't heard his answer clearly, Lin Qingyu would have thought that he had misunderstood – perhaps Gu Fuzhou didn't like him that much.

Lin Qingyu quickly rejected this idea. He wasn't blind; he had seen every little bit of how Gu Fuzhou interacted with him. He wasn't stupid either; the mountain has trees and the trees have branches, my heart has you yet you don't

know — Gu Fuzhou poisoned himself in order to return to him; no matter how sleepy he was, he would wake up to see him off to work; he could force himself to get out of bed in the early winter morning to pour him tea. If this wasn't love, how could there be lovers in this world?

Then, why was Gu Fuzhou being so quiet?

The groom saw Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou, and said, "General, Madam, you're back. Will you be heading back to the mansion now?"

Lin Qingyu glanced at Gu Fuzhou. Gu Fuzhou, slow to react, opened his mouth to say, "Let's…go back…"

Lin Qingyu understood it somewhat now and he couldn't help but smile silently. He took the lead in getting into the carriage. As soon as that light

medicinal fragrance got farther away, Gu Fuzhou seemed to recover his senses. He grabbed Huan Tong and asked anxiously, “How do I look like?”

Huan Tong was perplexed. “How do you look like? The General looks about the same as usual.”

Gu Fuzhou said bitterly, “But I feel like an idiot, the kind who can’t even walk straight.”

Huan Tong carefully looked at Gu Fuzhou. “Now that the General mentioned it, you do seem to be a lot stiffer than usual.”

Gu Fuzhou’s back straightened and his whole body became even more rigid. At this time, the groom gave him another fatal blow. “Just now, when I saw the General and the Madam walking together, the General’s arms seemed to be swinging in tandem with his steps.”

Gu Fuzhou: “…”

Lin Qingyu’s voice came from the carriage. “Aren’t we leaving yet?”

Gu Fuzhou took a deep breath. “I’m coming.”

As soon as he entered the carriage, the surrounding noise instantly receded. With the door closed, it felt like only this piece of space remained in the entire

world. Gu Fuzhou sat down beside Lin Qingyu. The groom let out a shout to spur the horses on and the carriage started running.

Lin Qingyu's scent lingered around Gu Fuzhou once again. Gu Fuzhou's Adam's apple bobbed and he said, "Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu looked down at his hand on his knee. "En?"

"Did you hear me just now when I said I wanted to date you?"

"I heard you."

"So you really did hear me." Gu Fuzhou still wasn't completely at ease and confirmed again, "I said…"

You said, 'I will, I want to. I have liked you for a long time. I liked you when I read about you. When you died, I cursed eighteenth generations of the author's ancestors. I am willing to get up early for you, to fight for you. I will accompany you wherever you want to go and I'll give to you to spend all the money I make. I will protect you and even if you wake me up in the middle of the night, I won't ever be angry with you. I like wating for you, I like watching you deal poison, I like listening to you and I want nothing more than for you to always be happy…I like you, I want to be with you.' Lin Qingyu repeated Gu Fuzhou's words word for word, "These words , I heard them all."

Gu Fuzhou was stunned and he could hardly believe it. "No way, was I that incoherent and illogical? Why was 'protect you' followed by 'won't ever be

angry with you'. How are these two even connected?"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyelashes. Holding back a smile, he said, "You'll have to ask yourself that."

Gu Fuzhou lowered his eyes and said sullenly, "Just now, I was completely un-cool, wasn't I?"

Lin Qingyu didn't forget to learn about Gu Fuzhou's hometown dialect. He asked curiously, "Does 'cool' mean handsome?"

Gu Fuzhou nodded. Angry with himself, he said regretfully, "Sigh, I wanted to deliver lines with ease, to appear witty. That would have been a lot morre handsome. I've already thought about it, you know. I was going to use poetry to express my feelings for you. I was gonna appear classy and say a funny joke to ease the awkward atmosphere. But this is my first confession and I have no experience, so I was so fucking nervous." Gu Fuzhou gave a low laugh, "Don't think badly of me, Qingyu. I will try my best be a lot more cool in the future so

that I won't embarrass you. If you found my confession is too confusing, I can confess again. But you're going to have to give me a little time to prepare…"

"No need." Lin Qingyu raised the corners of his lips. "I think the one just now was pretty good. You were very handsome; I liked it a lot."

Gu Fuzhou was in a daze. After a while, he said, "Then, are we together now?"

Lin Qingyu's cheeks went slightly red. He grabbed Gu Fuzhou's hand that seemed not to know where to go. "En, we're together now."

Instantly, a tremor ran throughout Gu Fuzhou's body, paralyzing his heart, his limbs, every corner of his body.

And Lin Qingyu had done nothing more than grab his hand.

Before the confession, the two of them had held hands. They've even hugged and slept together but never has he felt this kind of burning.

Is this what it's like to be in a relationship with someone you like? It's a bit… heady.

It was near zishi by the time they got back to the General's Mansion. It was quite late and they were all somewhat tired. After washing up and changing clothes, Gu Fuzhou stood in front of the bunk bed, feeling a bit at a loss.

Sleeping on the same bed on the first day of a relationship, wouldn't that be

moving too fast? Gu Fuzhou asked tentatively, “Hey, Qingyu, should I climb up to sleep now?”

Lin Qingyu paused. He nodded and said, “Alright.”

After Gu Fuzhou got into bed, Lin Qingyu blew out the candle. The room went dark and only sources of light were the clear moonlight shining in from the window along with the light of the lanterns under the eaves.

This night, although Lin Qingyu was tired, he didn’t feel sleepy. It was quiet in the upper bunk had been quiet and when he thought that Gu Fuzhou might already be sleeping soundly, he couldn’t sleep even more.

It was the first time they were officially in a relationship and unexpected made him, a man, like a girl harboring thoughts of of spring. He kept tossing and turning the entire night, unable to fall asleep. This thing called affection cannot be underestimated.

Lin Qingyu didn’t fall asleep until it was almost dawn. In his sleep, he heard someone calling “General”. When he opened his eyes, he saw that it was Huan Tong, calling Gu Fuzhou to wake up.

Lin Qingyu was usually the one who woke Gu Fuzhou up but today even he slept in. Huan Tong had no choice but to brace himself and be the one to do it. Huan Tong didn’t want to wake up the Young Master so he kept his voice low.

But instead of waking up the General, he had disturbed the Young Master's sleep.

Lin Qingyu sat up. "Go and prepare the General's uniform; I'll get him up."

Gu Fuzhou was dragged out from under the quilt by Lin Qingyu. Yawning, he got out of bed. Noticing that Lin Qingyu's complexion was not very good, his sleepiness disappeared immediately, "Qingyu, didn't you sleep last night?"

"En."

Gu Fuzhou looked down at Lin Qingyu, helping him dress and asked, "Why weren't you able to sleep well?"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes and glanced at him. "What do you think?"

Turned out he wasn't the only one who felt flustered. After one night, Gu Fuzhou seemed to be back to normal. Lin Qingyu saw a smile appear on his

lips and Gu Fuzhou said, “Doctor Lin had looked so calm, his heart like still water. I thought our pledge of love didn’t mean much to you.”

Lin Qingyu’s cheeks burned hot and he couldn’t help but retort, ”That’s right. It really isn’t much. I’m not flustered at all.”

Gu Fuzhou simply didn’t believe it and he smiled happily, “You’re already losing sleep over it and you’re still being stubborn.”

Lin Qingyu said, unconcerned, “Are you happy seeing me lose sleep?”

“To be honest, a little bit.” Gu Fuzhou said honestly, “But losing sleep over me this once is good enough. You have to make sure to sleep well in the future.”

“Naturally.”

After Gu Fuzhou got dressed, Lin Qingyu saw him off at the gate of the mansion as per usual. Before getting on the carriage, Gu Fuzhou suddenly

asked him, “What do you guys in the Dayu usually do after getting together? Are you allowed to seek pleasure and make merry with complete abandon?”

“No.” Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “According to the Dayu’s customs, even when you’re in a relationship, you must still abide by etiquette. Revel in the feeling, treat with courtesy; joy without wantonness.”

The smile on Gu Fuzhou’s face disappeared. “Then, treat it as though I never asked.”

Lin Qingyu felt a little like laughing. “Get in the carriage, don’t miss the morning court.”

Gu Fuzhou stood still and said slowly, “No, but the rules you mentioned are rules for people who’ve pledged their love but have yet to be married. Since we

are already married, why are we still 'Revel in the feeling, treat with courtesy; joy without wantonness?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Then what do you want?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled, "Since the Dayu's rules are not suitable, we should follow the rules of my hometown."

With that said, Gu Fuzhou leaned down and touched his lips lightly onto his forehead.

Like a dragonfly skimming the surface of the water; parting with barely a touch.

Lin Qingyu only felt a heat on his forehead. Before he could fully feel it, Gu Fuzhou's scent that shrouded him was already fading.

Gu Fuzhou straightened his body and caught Lin Qingyu's bearing, composed and unruffled, as though just now had been nothing but the wind blowing against his face.

At the same time, Lin Qingyu's pale cheeks quickly flushed, his long lashes also trembled slightly.

Gu Fuzhou could his heart about to melt. He smiled. "As expected of Doctor Lin, so unruffled despite being just kissed. Unlike me whose heart is about to

jump into my throat."

Lin Qingyu calmed down and said, "You collapse all to easily with a single blow."

So, in Gu Fuzhou's hometown, the custom after marriage was just forehead kisses. And here he thought, he would do something more. He was thinking too much. It seems that people from Gu Fuzhou's hometown were mostly reserved people uninterested in self-indulgence.

Not long after the New Year, Lin Qingyu received news from Zhang Shiquan that he had completed all his assigments.

Rumors that queen of the Northern Border was a man and that the king was furious upon finding out spread like wildfire in the north. Naturally, shadow guards of the Tianji Camp, sent to the north by Xiao Cheng to look for Shen Huaishi also caught wind of this. ear. The shadow guards of the Tianji Camp spured their horses to full speed, rushing to report this matter to their superiors.

How the Tianji camp informed the Rmperor, and how the emperor reacted upon hearing it, Lin Qingyu did not know. All he knew was that the emperor flew into a rage and his bouts of headache recurred. It had now reached the point that he needed to stay in bed to recuperate. Even so, the emperor first summoned the empress and berated her. He then, that same night, he

summoned all his confidants and trusted ministers to discuss the matter of the Northern Border.

The war in the northwest had yet to cease and the treasury has been empty for a long time. If there was disloyalty at the Northern Border at this time, the court will be beseiged on both sides. The army's provisions wouldn't be enough; they would be short on soldiers and would have no general to lead them. They would simply have no way to withstand it. The only fortunate thing was that until now this was nothing more than an unconfirmed rumor. The King of the Northern Border had also sent a letter wishing for the Emperor's good health not long ago. It was no different from other such letters sent before.

A palace maid turned out to be a man. If this matter was true, the Empress, who was in charge of the palaces, could not escape responsibility. When Lin Qingyu went to greet the Empress, this was what was weighing on her mind.

This palace has already checked the records of the Shangyu bureau at that time. There was nothing wrong with Jingchun's identity. This matter may just be a rumor but it caused the Emperor to fly into a rage. He has even cast doubt on my ability to govern the palaces…" The Empress closed her eyes and let out a long sigh, "It is simply difficult for me to tell about my suffering."

Gu Fuzhou said earlier that the reason why Jingchun was able to trick everyone in those days was due to Xiao Cheng's protection. Xiao Cheng's handling of the matter was watertight. Naturally, he wouldn't so easily give the

game away. As for the aunt who had covered up the fact that Jingchun had entered the Shangyi Bureau as a man back then, she was already dead.

Lin Qingyu asked, “There cannot be waves without wind. Since such rumors about in the north, there might truly be something doubtful about Princess Jingchun’s identity. That the King of the North has yet to attack, may simply be because he does not wish to beat the grass to scare the snake.”

The Empress said, “I have ordered people to investigate this matter thoroughly. It has been more than ten years since Jingchun entered the palace and the female official in charge of the Shangyi Bureau at the time, has already left the palace to get married. It will take some time.”

Lin Qingyu knew that this matter should not be rushed. So he diverted the topic for the time being, and said, “Niangniang, how has His Highness, the Sixth Prince, been recently?”

With the conversation turning to her child, the empress’ expression softened a bit. “The servants who had been serving Li’er have been beaten and thrown out. I have selected a new group of servants to serve in Jinyang Garden. Having had warning from an overturned cart, they ought to know what they should

do. The day before yesterday, Lai Fu went to Jinyang Garden to see Li'er. He said Li'er has grown a little taller and his spirit has improved a lot."

Lin Qingyu smiled. "That's good."

"Even so, I am still unable to rest at ease." The Empress said, "Jinyang Garden lacks a good doctor. If you are free, go and see him for my sake."

Lin Qingyu nodded in response.

Lin Qingyu left Fengyi Palace and seeing that it was almost time, he walked towards the Qinzheng Palace. Gu Fuzhou was summoned to the palace by the emperor early in the morning to discuss politics. He should be finishing right about now.

It so happened that it was Xiao Songzi who was on duty at Qinzheng Hall. When he saw Lin Qingyu, he was a little perplexed. "Didn't Doctor Lin already ask to diagnose His Majesty's pulse this morning?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I didn't come to ask to examine His Majesty."

"Then that's…"

While the two were talking, the discussion in Qinzheng Hall ended. The Prime Minister came out first, followed by Nan'an Hou. When Nan'an Hou saw Lin Qingyu, his face changed slightly and he took a detour. It seemed he was

feeling diffident. Gu Fuzhou did not come out until the end. Meeting Lin Qingyu's gaze, the corners of his lips curved and he strode towards him.

"Why is the Madam here?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I was just passing by. If the General is finished handling his affairs, would you like to come back to the Mansion with me?"

Gu Fuzhou said politely, "Madam, please."

Seeing this situation, Xue Ying, who was seeing the ministers out of the palace, couldn't help but sigh, "General Gu has truly been blessed."

It was inconvenient to talk in the palace so only when they got into the carriage did Lin Qingyu ask, "How were things in Qinzheng Hall today?"

"It was all a bunch of nonsense." Gu Fuzhou said in a lazy tone, "The only useful thing was that Xiao Jie did a good job of raising the funds and provisions for the army. The Emperor showered him with praises and asked him to help Xiao Cheng in managing affairs."

Lin Qingyu told Gu Fuzhou what the Empress had said. "Regarding the case of Princess Jingchun, there is no physical evidence and the witness is already

dead. If the King of the North is of a mind to hide this matter for Jingchun, it will be difficult to draw this matter to a close."

Gu Fuzhou said casually, "It's not easy to get evidence. Shen Huaishi and Xiao Cheng are both witnesses."

"Shen Huaishi…" Lin Qingyu pondered, "I hope we can find his whereabouts as soon as possible."

The author has something to say: As a native of Da Zhuang's hometown, I do not want to be represented by Da Zhuang (dog head)

Chapter 79

Gu Fuzhou's trusted guards did not keep the two of them waiting for long. After searching for a fortnight, they brought good news back to the capital.

"We followed the general's instructions and went all the way to the south. Finally, we found Shen Gongzi in a fishing village in the Southern Border. We then showed him the Madam's token and told him that the Madam wished to meet and speak with him. He agreed to meet with the Madam without any hesitation." The Mansion's guard took out a secret letter from his bosom. "This is what Shen Gongzi asked me to give to the Madam."

The Southern Border fishing village was the place where Gu Fuzhou had asked his trusted guards to focus their search. In the original book, Shen Huaishi met his very first friend in this fishing village. He lived with simple fishermen and gradually let go of the past. After three years of peaceful days, he was found by the Tianji Camp.

In the book, in order to avoid the pursuit of Tianji Camp, Shen Huaishi left the fishing village and ran away again. Xiao Cheng, who by then was already the emperor, couldn't wait for his return and unexpectedly he left the capital to

personally go and find him. By force, he dragged him back and imprisoned him in the palace.

It was said that when Xiao Cheng faced the blatant hatred in Shen Huaishi's eyes, he said, "You hate Zhen. At least you still have Zhen in your eyes. Zhen would rather you hate Zhen for the Zhen's life than not have you by Zhen's side."

In the present world, Gu Fuzhou found Shen Huaishi first while the Tianji Camp was still searching in vain in the north. At first, Xiao Cheng had only half-believed that Shen Huaishi was in the north. But now, there was a "rumour" from the north that the Princess Jingchun was a man, which strengthened his suspicion that Shen Huaishi really was there. After all, the only people in the capital who knew Jingchun's true identity were him and Shen Huaishi.

Lin Qingyu opened the letter. Only five words were written in it: Insect's Wake, the old haunt.

In three it would be Insect's Wake. The old haunt should be the Changsheng Temple, where he and Shen Huaishi had met several times.

Gu Fuzhou said, "Well done, go and receive your rewards."

After the guards retreated, Gu Fuzhou said pensively, "It seems that you remain to be someone of import to Shen Huaishi. With the single invitation, he returns to the capital heedless of the danger. He's not even afraid of being

caught by the Tianji Camp. You've obviously been nothing cold towards him, all harsh words and stern looks, yet why does he still have such a good impression of you?"

Lin Qingyu burned the secret letter with the candle's flame. "I treated his wounds for him. You could say I saved his life. I told him the 'truth' regarding the destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect. And besides, all my harsh words and stern looks were in order to make him see Xiao Cheng's true face as soon as possible. I reminded him he ought not to hold himself so cheaply. Shen Huaishi is a loyal and honest person. It is only reasonable that he be friendly towards me."

Gu Fuzhou was playing with the candlelight, shuttling his fingers back and forth through the flame. "I still think the main reason is that you're beautiful. Were you anyone else, try to reason with Shen Huaishi and you'd be lucky if he

doesn't immediately take out his sword on you. At the invitation from a great beauty, one would come even at the cost of one's life."

Lin Qingyu begged to differ, "Shen Huaishi may be gay but I'm not the type he likes."

"Do you have some sort of misconception about yourself, Madam?" Gu Fuzhou smiled, "With looks like yours, you are everyone's type."

Three days later, as per their agreement, Lin Qingyu came to Changsheng Temple. Gu Fuzhou accompanied him. Lin Qingyu asked, "Do you think Shen Huaishi will agree to testify for us?"

Gu Fuzhou didn't even have to think about it. "No. Regardless of whether or not he harbors any love for Xiao Cheng, in order to protect Jingchun, he will not reveal the truth."

Lin Qingyu pondered, "Then how can we use Shen Huaishi to confirm this matter?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Call me 'Lao Gong', I'll help you find a way."

Lin Qingyu's mood suddenly turned complicated. He had already confessed his feelings for Gu Fuzhou and Gu Fuzhou was still thinking about going to the palace to be a eunuch. No wonder he was only willing to kiss his forehead

even after establishing their relationship. Gu Fuzhou was reluctant to take a step closer.

It matters not. After all, sexual passion, this kind of thing wasn't necessary for him. So long as the two of them love each other and can stay together, it was enough. Hopefully, this was all just talk on Gu Fuzhou's part and that he wasn't going to actually going to mutilate himself.

Without any expression on his face, Lin Qingyu called, "Lao Gong". Gu Fuzhou was dissatisfied and he joked, "That was such a flat delivery. You need to soften your voice a little otherwise I won't feel anything from it. Try again; you can do it."

Lin Qingyu would not be persuaded. "Are you going to think up of something or not?"

Seeing the beauty's face darken, Gu Fuzhou decided to quit while he was ahead and said, "Once you meet Shen Huaishi, there is no need for you to force him; just…"

Shen Huaishi only trusted Lin Qingyu and would not reveal himself with Gu Fuzhou around. The two parted in the front hall and Lin Qingyu headed alone to the back of the temple. Shen Huaishi was someone who keeps his word. He

might even be shadowing him right at this moment. He would appear in front of him when the time was right.

Lin Qingyu, saying that he wasn't feeling well, asked a monk for a spare room to temporarily rest in. He waited in the side room for about as long as it took to burn a stikc of incense when suddenly a gust of wind blew in, making the windows creak. Lin Qingyu walked to the window and closed it. Upon turning back around, there was now another person in front of him.

After not seeing each other for a long time, Shen Huaishi seemed to have completely changed. His appearance hadn't changed much save for being a lot more tanned; it was his temperament that was the biggest change. The last time Lin Qingyu met with him was when Xiao Ting was assassinated. At that time, Shen Huaishi knew the truth that Lin Qingyu wanted him to know, and was dejected and depressed. But now, those eyes are looking at it, there is no waves, the distant silence, like the vicissitudes of life.

"Imperial Guard Shen." Lin Qingyu said, "I trust you've been well since we last met."

Shen Huaishi gave him a shallow smile. He seemed not to have smile for a long time; the movement at the corner of his lips appeared stiff. "Doctor Lin."

Lin Qingyu looked at the plain-looking man in front of him. It would be a lie to say that he felt nothing in his heart. As Gu Fuzhou had said, Shen Huaishi

had finally settled down in the Southern Border but because of his invitation, he return to the capital. This friendship was certainly not easy.

The two sat opposite each other. Lin Qingyu made a cup of tea and pushed the tea cup in front of Shen Huaishi. “You must have had a difficult journey.”

Shen Huaishi stared at Lin Qingyu’s jade-white slender hands. He asked softly, “Doctor Lin… How did you find me in the Southern Border?”

“If I told you it was a coincidence, would you believe me?”

Shen Huaishi hesitated for a moment, then nodded.

Lin Qingyu sighed, “You simply believe what others tell you. How have you managed to live until now?”

Shen Huaishi was a little dazed. “Probably, because I’m skilled.”

Lin Qingyu chuckled. “Well, you are right in saying that.” It was undoubtedly one of the reasons but the main one was because Shen Huaishi, like Xiao Cheng, was a protagonist of this world.

With Lin Qingyu’s smile, the simple and unadorned side room brightened. Shen Huaishi looked at him and couldn’t help be reminded of Jingchun. Their

eyes looked so similar that every time he saw Lin Qingyu, he would a sense of closeness.

He and Jingchun had grown up together. Even with Xiao Cheng between them, his desire to protect Jingchun would not change.

Shen Huaishi said, “Your messenger told me that Doctor Lin has a life-or-death matter with which you need my help with. Could it be…” Shen Huaishi paused, “that person is making trouble for you again?”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Xiao Cheng no longer harbors such thoughts towards me.”

Hearing Xiao Cheng’s name, Shen Huai’s eyes darkened a little. “That’s good.”

“Now, all his focus has been on finding you.” Lin Qingyu said while observing Shen Huaishi’s expression, “Judging by his actions, it seems he won’t ever give

up until he finds you. It is unfortunate you were unable to finish him off. With him gone, I reckon there wouldn't be all this fuss now."

Shen Huaishi was dazed. After a while, he said quietly, "I'm useless, I couldn't even take revenge for the Heavenly Prison Sect."

"And if I give you another chance to take revenge?"

Shen Huaishi's pupils shrank. "…Doctor Lin?"

Lin Qingyu breached the main topic, "Let me ask you, is Princess Jingchun a man or a woman?"

Shen Huaishi suddenly stood up. He got up so violently that he accidentally bumped into the table, sending the teacups colliding together with a clinking sound. "How did you know?"

"I don't. I heard that there are such rumors in the North." Lin Qingyu said, "Looking at your reaction, this rumor seems to be true."

Shen Huaizhi pursed his lips without speaking, his lips pressed tightly into a straight line.

Lin Qingyu added, "You are but a mere shadow guard. Thinking about it, you wouldn't have had the ability to put in effect this sort of deception for

Jingchun. Undoubtedly, this was Xiao Cheng's doing. Looking at the bigger picture, this is a crime, a deception of the Emperor."

Shen Huaishi's tone stiffened a bit. "If this is what Doctor Lin has come looking for me for, then I'm sorry but I cannot tell you."

Lin Qingyu glanced at him. "Is this for Xiao Cheng's sake or for Jingchun's?"

"Me and His–… Xiao Cheng and I have already settled our accounts when I wounded him with me sword." Shen Huaishi said, intricate and obscure, "But Jingchun has nothing to do with this matter and I can't involve him."

"Settled your accounts?" Lin Qingyu's eyes went fierce, "Your whole family died tragically because of the Xiao Clan and with a single stab of your sword, your accounts are now clear?"

"I don't know…" Shen Huaishi closed his eyes in pain, "I just want to live a peaceful life now. Doctor Lin, don't force me."

Shen Huaishi's refusal came as no surprise. Lin Qingyu knew that it was useless to try and persuade him. He said, "If you insist that you two are now

even, how can I force you? I'm sorry to have trouble you into making this trip. You should go now."

Shen Huaishi made as if to speak but hesitated. His hands clenched into fists and then loosened, "I shall see you again."

"Wait." Lin Qingyu took off the golden stone serving as an ornament tied around his waist, "Take this. If you wish to find me in the future, you can show this token as proof. Give me something of yours as well."

Shen Huaishi took the golden stone and put it away carefully. He hesitated for a moment, then took out a purple palace sash from his bosom. Handing it to Lin Qingyu, he said solemnly, "Doctor Lin, no matter what it is you wish to do, please do not hurt Jingchun."

As long as his goals were achieved, Lin Qingyu cared not a whit whether others lived or died. But looking at Shen Huaishi's pleading eyes, Lin Qingyu promised him nonetheless, "Do not worry. Jingchun has a husband who loves him like his own life. No harm will come to him. If you have the energy to

worry, I suggest you worry about yourself. I've already caused the Tianji Camp to conduct their search to the North. Take care of yourself."

Shen Huaishi placed a fist against his palm in salute. "Thank you, Doctor Lin."

Another gust of wind blew and Shen Huaishi disappeared.

Lin Qingyu returned to the main hall, but did not see Gu Fuzhou, who should have been waiting here for him. He asked the monk about Gu Fuzhou's whereabouts and was told that he was at the mountain behind the temple, sitting in consultation with the National Teacher.

Lin Qingyu remembered the last time he and Gu Fuzhou came to Changsheng Temple together. Gu Fuzhou had also met Xu Junyuan then. Xu Junyuan was often in closed-door cultivation year round. It was difficult even for the Empress to seek an audience but Gu Fuzhou was able to see him every time. This seemed to be the true for both Gu Fuzhou as well as when we was Lu Wancheng.

Xu Junyuan was unfathomable. He seemed to know everything but at the same time, nothing. It made it difficult to pin him down.

When Lin Qingyu went looking in the mountain, Gu Fuzhou and Xu Junyuan had already finished their conversation. Xu Junyuan was personally seeing Gu

Fuzhou off when he saw Lin Qingyu coming. He raised his eyebrows, “The General’s wife is here.”

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly, polite yet distance. “Greetings to the National Teacher.”

Gu Fuzhou said, “Qingyu, we should thank the National Teacher.”

“Why?”

Because he’ll be doing us a little favor.

“The General exaggerates.” Xu Junyuan said with a smile, “It is my honor to be of service to the General.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Is it not enough of an honor for the National Teacher to be of service to His Majesty?”

Xu Junyuan heard Lin Qingyu’s unspoken implication and said calmly, “How the General and His Majesty, two different matters altogether, be lumped as one?”

“No need to waste you time arguing with him.” Gu Fuzhou was quite experienced, “The National Teacher is a man of enigma and he will never

answer your questions directly. All your questions will simply be in vain."

Xu Junyuan couldn't help laughing. "The General; one who knows me best."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "Be that as it may, there is still one matter I wish to consult with the National Teacher."

"I invite the Madam to speak freely."

"The National Teacher once said that the reason for His Highness the Sixth Prince's dullness is the loss of his soul."

"Madam, you've seen His Highness the Sixth Prince's medical records? Indeed, His Highness lost his soul when he was young, no medical remedy would be of

any use." Xu Junyuan sighed, "Only Heaven knows how long His Highness will last."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "What do you mean by this?"

Xu Junyuan said, "A soul is separated from the body, this runs counter to Heavenly law. How could it possibly last?"

Lin Qingyu's heart suddenly sank. He asked, "A soul separated from the body cannot last. Then what of a soul in a different body?"

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu and said helplessly, "Qingyu…"

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "The humble one does not know."

On the way back, Lin Qingyu was worried and his brows furrowed. Gu Fuzhou coaxed him for a long time could not get him to cheer up. Back in the mansion, the servants had already prepared their evening meal but Lin Qingyu had no appetite. "You finish eating, I'll go to the study."

How could Gu Fuzhou dare to eat when Lin Qingyu would not. He chased after him to the study room where he saw Lin Qingyu holding a book of which

he didn't turn even a single page even after a long time. He came over and took the medical book from his hand.

Lin Qingyu stood up and stretched out his hand to take it back: "Give it back to me."

Gu Fuzhou grabbed his hand and said, "Xu Junyuan was talking about Xiao Li, not me. Don't substitute it indiscriminately, Doctor Lin. Didn't he say that he doesn't know about this matter of soul transfers."

Lin Qingyu said slowly, "I can't not worry. Your soul is too confusing."

Gu Fuzhou leaned against the table and actually began spinning the book on the tip of his finger. "Then now is not the time to worry about this. We should focus on the things that are right in front of us."

"That's easy for you to say." Lin Qingyu pressed down on the space between his brows. "You're not the one who's going to be left behind."

Gu Fuzhou fell silent.

"Do you think I don't know that thinking about this is useless?"Lin Qingyu said softly, "I just… can't control it."

Gu Fuzhou smiled, "Then what should we do? How about we do something to

distract you?”

Lin Qingyu could not muster any interest. “Like what?”

“Like…” Gu Fuzhou paused and the book stopped spinning. He threw the book onto the table, bent down, and pressed his lips against Lin Qingyu’s cool lips.

Lin Qingyu’s heart skipped a beat. Whether Shen Huaishi or Xu Junyuan, they all disappeared from his mind the moment he felt those lips touch his.

Gu Fuzhou’s kiss was soft and warm but due to lack of romantic experience, it lacked method.

In any case, this time, Gu Fuzhou acted as he wished and he was more than equal to the task, doing so calmly and unhurriedly.

But hand against Gu Fuzhou’s chest, Lin Qingyu could feel his heart pounding from nervousness.

Gu Fuzhou’s heart was beating so fast, even faster than his.

You sure are good at pretending, Jiang Gongzi.

Thinking so, Lin Qingyu tentatively stuck out the tip of his tongue, a clumsy response borne of inexperience to his kiss.

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Chapter 80

As soon as Lin Qingyu's tongue stretched in, it was hooked and tangled. Gu Fuzhou successfully distracted him. Immersed in Gu Fuzhou's scent, Lin Qingyu discarded all thoughts about separated souls and souls in the wrong body.

Gradually, Lin Qingyu's lips began to numb, his breathing becoming more and more rapid. He couldn't take it anymore and wanted to push Gu Fuzhou away. Gu Fuzhou put one hand on the back of his head and clasped his fingers with the other, hugging him even tighter.

Only when his lips were bitten did Gu Fuzhou let him go.

Lin Qingyu was panting lightly. His cheeks were burning red and his lips were moist and glistening. The light in his eyes darkened, revealing a rarely-seen confusion, as though he were confused by his own various reactions.

Gu Fuzhou chuckled lightly: "Doctor Lin's face is so red." Fortunately, his skin now wasn't as pale so he was able to get away with it. If he had kissed Lin Qingyu with his own original body, based on how hot his face felt right now, his blush would have trumped Lin Qingyu's many times over.

Lin Qingyu felt his face with the back of his hand. Sure enough, it was astonishingly hot. He forced himself to calm down and said, "Because you

made me unable to breathe. It's normal for one's face to go red when you're short of breath."

Gu Fuzhou asked curiously, "Does Doctor Lin not know how to regulate his breathing?"

Lin Qingyu felt inexplicably angry and humiliated. He said without batting an eyelid. "Well, I'm not as good at it as you are."

Gu Fuzhou smiled. "Actually, I'm not that good at it either but just now, I think I've begun to get the hang of it. I can teach you."

Lin Qingyu turned his face away. "Maybe another day."

Gu Fuzhou blinked. "Another…day?"

"It's getting late, I'm going to bed."

That night, the two fell asleep as they usually did; one at the bottom bunk, the other at the top. Strange to say but though they had slept in the same bed several times before they'd begun dating, after, they never slept in the same bed again. Every night before going to bed, an inexplicable awkwardness would descend upon them. They would blush whenever their eyes met,

making the atmosphere even more awkward. Until finally, they would tacitly go to their separate beds, like two shy newly-wed brides.

He didn't know how other people's first love was like, but for Gu Fuzhou, his first love was the restlessness of the young and inexperienced. Even though he and Lin Qingyu had known each other for so long already and had even had physical contact, now that they were in a proper relationship, he still occasionally felt nervous whenever he was alone with the other. But once there were others present, he cannot be nervous.

He couldn't show his nervousness; he didn't want to appear useless.

In the silence, Gu Fuzhou, who had just kissed the beauty in the lower bunk, suddenly laughed. "Qingyu…"

Lin Qingyu had his eyes closed. "Why haven't you fallen asleep yet?" The feelings have subsided; recalling the kiss just now, Lin Qingyu had a vague feeling that something wasn't quite right though he couldn't think what exactly about it was wrong.

"Aren't you still awake too?" Gu Fuzhou said with a smile, "I just want to tell you that kissing you was not at all tiring. I like it very much."

Gu Fuzhou's remarks seemed to imply that if kissing made him tired, he wouldn't like kissing anymore? Kissing was certainly not tiring. If it were,

Jiang Gongzi would wouldn't like it much. This might just be the origin of his lifelong dream.

Lin Qingyu felt a little like laughing. "As long as you liked it."

Gu Fuzhou asked, "Then, did you like it?"

Gu Fuzhou waited for a long time without getting a response from Lin Qingyu's. When he finally turned over to go to sleep, he heard a soft "I liked it." from the lower bunk.

When Lin Qingyu returned to the palace, he was summoned by the Empress to Fengyi Palace.

The King of the Northern Border saw that the rumors of Jingchun being a man had intensified and had even reached the emperor's ears. He finally made a move.

"The King of the North has sent to the Emperor a letter with well-wishes for His Majesty's health. In it, he has mentioned this matter, saying that it is simply unfounded nonsense and that his queen is genuinely a woman." The empress said, "He also said that he would investigate this matter thoroughly; that he will find who is behind this rumor and punish him severely."

After Zhang Shiquan had finished his work, he took his people and immediately left the Northern Border. This investigation would lead to

nothing. The King of the North was going this to protect Jingchun and at the same time, to avoid a rift with the capital.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Does His Majesty believe it?”

“The missive was written in the King of the North’s own handwriting. Naturally, the Emperor believes it.”

“Not necessarily.” Lin Qingyu said, “Niangniang, you may wish to investigate this further.”

The Empress said, perplexed, “The truth has been laid out. What is there to investigate?”

“Whether the King of the Norther Border is deceiving the Emperor.”

The Empress could not understand. “Why would the King of the North lie about this matter?”

Lin Qingyu said, “In order to let the capital relax its vigilance and strike whilst it is unprepared.”

The Empress’ face sank, “This matter is of grave import. You must not speak such reckless remarks.”

“It is because this matter is of great import that the Emperor should scrutinize it ever more carefully and not simply take the King of the North’s word as

truth. As they say, he who is not one of us, has a heart that is not of us. As the mother of the country, Niangniang has a responsibility to put to right what His Majesty hears. I ask niangniang to remind His Majesty to bind around with silk before it rains so as to avoid confusion amongst the military."

The Empress looked pensive. "I understand."

After Lin Qingyu withdrew, the Empress headed to the emperor's palace. At that time, the Imperial Hospital had just delivered his medicine. While feeding the emperor his medicine, the Empress repeated all the Lin Qingyu had said. "Chenqie is of the opinion that this matter should be thoroughly investigated."

The Emperor looked at the Empress with a somewhat probing look. The Empress smiled and said, "Could it be that there is something wrong with what chenqie has said?"

"No, Zhen simply did not expect that the Empress would share the same thought." The Emperor's brows were furrowed, filled with doubts, "It is suspicious how strongly the King of the North asserts this statement. The more one tries to hide, the more it is exposed. The Empress is right. This

matter must be investigated completely. However, this must not be made public. Investigate it secretly; that should suffice."

The Empress nodded. "Do not worry, Your Majesty. Chenqie will find the truth behind this matter."

The Emperor held the Empress' hand and said warmly, "In the harem, it is only the Empress who can share Zhen's worries."

The Empress was quite moved. "Your Majesty…"

The rare moment of affection between husband and wife was interrupted by Xue Ying, who came to announces, "Your Majesties, the National Teacher asks to see you."

The Empress said in surprise, "A sudden visit from the National Teacher? It must be important."

The Emperor sat up. "Quickly, invite him in."

Xu Junyuan had left the world of men. Detached from the mortal world, save for when personally summoned by the Emperor, he very comes to see anyone. The Emperor has always treated Xu Junyuan as a guest of honor — many decades ago, Xu Junyuan divined the Dayu's national fortune. He foretold a

battle for the throne, an alliance by marriage with the North and the Xixia taking up arms.

Within a decade, Xu Junyuan's words all proved true. The Emperor has always placed stock in celestial phenomena. Nowadays, his reception of Xu Junyuan was simply beyond any reproach. For the Emperor, Xu Junyuan's casual words held more weight than those of any number of ministers'.

Once within the palace, the Emperor immediately invited Xu Junyuan to sit, dispensing with ceremony. Though Xu Junyuan could not be called extremely deferential toward the Emperor, he was nonetheless very polite. "The Emperor is not looking well. It is my hope the Your Majesty may look after your body."

"These headaches is an old, recurrent problem. At times good, at times bad. There is also no telling when it comes." The Emperor said eagerly, "Does the

National Teacher have a reason for his visit to the palace? Could it be that a cure for Zhen's condition is possible?"

Xu Junyuan said, "Your Majesty is the Imperial Son of Heaven and I am but a mere mortal. Drifting clouds obscure my eyes, how am I to see the path of the Son of Heaven?"

The Emperor's shoulders slumped, revealing slight disappointment. This was not the first time he has asked Xu Junyuan to help him with a division and every time Xu Junyuan's response was the same.

The Empress asked, "If this is the case, then why has the National Teacher come? Could it be that Li'er's lost soul…"

The Emperor eyed the Empress askance, gone was the tenderness in his eyes. The Empress sensed his displeasure and had to shut her mouth.

Xu Junyuan seemed not to have heard the second half of the Empress' words. He said, "Yesterday, as I was watching the night sky, I caught a glimpse of four

stars aligning. If these four stars are to converge, it would spell disaster. Losses for the soldiers, worries for the rulers, banishment for the people."

The Emperor's expression turned extremely ugly. The Empress too frowned. "Does the National Teacher mean to say that Dayu will be under the threat of being besieged by war? Is it the Northwest, or…"

Xu Junyuan was noncommittal. He went on, "What is even more bizarre is that there is an inversion of yin and yang in the south. Moreover, this personage of yang, his fate is to soar high like a Feng Luan."

A personage of yang…Soar high like a Feng Luan?

The Empress looked uneasily towards the Emperor. "Your Majesty, this…"

The color drained from the Emperor's face. His whole body grew tense. He said, sounding grave, "Empress, I am giving you three days to find out Jingchun's true identity. If you are not up to the task, I will assign this investigation to Concubine Chen and there will be no need for you to hold on to your Phoenix seal, book and treasure."

The Empress hurriedly knelt down. "Chenqie obeys."

Upon exiting the palace, Lin Qingyu saw the General Mansion's carriage by the gate. The tacit understanding between him and Gu Fuzhou had gradually grown. So long as they were in the palace for the day, they would wait for each other to return to the Mansion together. Sure enough, when Lin Qingyu

entered the carriage, he saw Gu Fuzhou resting inside, his legs propped up. Seeing him arrive, Gu Fuzhou put his legs down and said, “Doctor Lin has worked hard. Let us dine out for our evening meal tonight.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Where are we going?”

Gu Fuzhou pulled him to sit beside him. “Jinxiu Pavilion.”

Jinxiu Pavilion was the most prestigious restaurant in capital. When Gu Fuzhou was still Lu Wancheng, the two had visited this place. They were now revisiting an old haunt. Jinxiu Pavilion was still the same restaurant from the outside and beside him was still Jiang Gongzi.

General Gu and his wife had honored them with a visit, Jinxiu Pavilion wanted to vacate a private room for them. However, Gu Fuzhou declined the restaurant manager’s kindness and brought Lin Qingyu to a compartment. The compartment was divided into two by a screen. As Lin Qingyu sat down,

he heard a voice from the other room. “Aunt Wu Ya, I haven’t seen you for a long time. Has Aunt been doing well since leaving the palace?”

It was Xi Rong’s voice.

Lin Qingyu cast an inquiring look at Gu Fuzhou. Gu Fuzhou lowered his voice to a whisper and said, “Don’t be impatient. Listen and you’ll understand.”

It was a timid woman’s voice, may 30-40 years old. “I’ve been very good, very good. Thank you, Eunuch Xi for your concern.”

Xi Rong’s voice grew a little colder. “Since I have left the palace with the prince, I am no longer to be addressed as ‘eunuch’. Aunt may can call me ‘Steward Xi’.”

“Yes, Steward Xi.” The woman named Wu Ya sounded as though she were talking on thin ice, “Did His Highness King Ning come to find this servant because he has instructions for me?”

Xi Rong said, “I seem to remember that when the Princess Jingchun was in the Shangyi Bureau, it was you who taught her?”

“……Yes.”

“Then, you should know very well whether Princess Jingchun is a man or a

woman."

Wu Ya hurriedly said, "Since the Princess Jingchun was in the employ of the Shangyi Bureau, how could she be a man.?"

Xi Rong said, "You sound so certain. Could it be that you've seen his body with your own eyes?"

Wu Ya mumbled, "Although I have not seen it, when a servant joins the palace, the head aunt must personally examine her."

"Unfortunately, the aunt who was the former head of the Shangyi Bureau, the same aunt who examined Princess Jingchun's body has long since passed away and cannot serve as witness. Why would someone kill her to ensure her silence if not to cover up some deceit?"

Wu Ya was shocked, "She's dead?"

"The Empress is investigating this matter and in a few days, she will find you." Xi Rong said calmly, "His Highness hopes that you can provide the Empress

with some useful clues. Of course, you are bound to benefit. I hear that you daughter is quite ill. Wouldn't you want to find a good doctor to save her life?"

Wu Ya said, sounding panicked, "I-I do not understand what His Highness means."

Wu Ya might not understand, but Lin Qingyu did. He asked Gu Fuzhou, "You want her to provide a false testimony?"

"She might be a false witness but she'll say is true."

"But even with a witness, the material evidence…" Lin Qingyu then thought of the token Gu Fuzhou had asked him to get from Shen Huaishi. He suddenly said, "That palace sash?"

"Altogether, there are three of these palaces sashes, divided between Shen Huaishi, Jingchun and Xiao Cheng. The three of them have always carried these tokens of their childhood friendship with them. Who would have thought there would come a day when it would serve instead as evidence to hasten one to one's death."

On the other side, after Xi Rong explained his plan, Wu Ya did not agree immediately; neither did Xi Rong force her. He said, "Go back and think about

this matter. However, best not take too long. It is not that the prince who cannot wait but your daughter."

After Wu Ya left, Xi Rong came around from behind the screen, "Greeting to the General and the Madam."

Lin Qingyu said, "Steward Rong Xi should make the most of his visit here — would you like to stay and dine together?"

"No, thank you, I must decline. His Highness is still waiting for me." Xi Rong saluted and said, "Allow me to bid you goodbye."

Xiao Jie had handled the matter regarding the military's provisions well and quickly, making the Emperor look at him with new eyes. Thereupon, the Emperor begun to entrust him with more and more tasks. Xiao Jie knew nothing about the government affairs and could only rely on Xi Rong for everything. Lin Qingyu could already imagine who would truly be wielding the imperial brush when Xiao Jie ascends the throne in the future.

Eunuchs in power have, time and time again, proven to be nothing but a disaster for the nation. When Xiao Cheng finds himself at the end of his fate, he should also prepare a retreat for himself and Gu Fuzhou, just in case.

Jinxiu Pavilion had a huge array of dishes and they were all exquisite. This was a rare visit for Gu Fuzhou and he ordered all their signature dishes. When the

two of them had gone through nearly half of it, Gu Fuzhou suddenly put down his chopsticks and his expression suddenly changed. “Damn.”

“What’s wrong?” Lin Qingyu was startled, “Was there poison in the dish?”

“No, that’s not it.” Gu Fuzhou said slowly, “A fishbone is stuck in my throat.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

Gu Fuzhou turned gloomy. “That’s why I hate eating fish. Why do fishes have to have bones?”

“Stop talking nonsense.” Lin Qingyu lifted Gu Fuzhou’s chin, “Open your mouth, let me see.”

Gu Fuzhou did as he was told. The fishbone was stuck in a spot that was quite deep. It was hard to see with the naked eye. Lin Qingyu poured him a cup of tea. “Try if you can swallow the fishbone.”

Gu Fuzhou had to finish off a whole pot of before he managed to dislodge the fishbone and swallow it. Lin Qingyu looked at him and said, tone filled with deep meaning, “As expected, last time wasn’t just my imagination.”

Gu Fuzhou had a bad premonition. “What last time?”

Lin Qingyu said slowly,”The general is tall and imposing, lofty and powerful.

Who would have thought his would be a bit smaller than usual?"

Gu Fuzhou was stunned. "Huh?"

The corners of Lin Qingyu's lips ticked up slightly. He said, teasing, "No wonder, last time you… I kept feeling something wasn't right."

Gu Fuzhou: "…"

The biggest uses of the tongue are for speaking and eating. Gu Fuzhou was no different from ordinary people, so he has never paid attention to the size of his tongue. Now that Lin Qingyu mentioned this, he was shocked to realize that the tongue of this body seemed to be quite small; at least shorter and smaller than Lu Wancheng's and his own. No one would possibly believe it.

Lin Qingyu said nonchalantly: "You don't have to worry too much about it. Although your tongue is smaller, it won't affect your daily life." Actually, it was quite cute.

Gu Fuzhou's expression was quite complicated. "Thank you. That's not very comforting."

Two days later, a major event happened in the palace – the prince's biological mother, Concubine Chen, who had been favored for many years, was deemed to have abused her power for personal gain, bringing great turmoil to the

harem. She was stripped of her title as Imperial Consort and thrown into the cold palace.

This incident came unexpectedly and took everyone by surprise. On the surface, it seemed to be a matter of the harem, but it was inextricably linked to the previous matter. Xiao Cheng, despite being in ill-health, knelt at the gate of Qinzheng Hall all night. But the Emperor did not even come out to see him, showing not the least bit of affection to this mother-son pair.

The crown prince had gradually lost His Majesty's regard and now, he has lost the help of his concubine mother. On the other hand, Xiao Jie had been granted his title as king and was entrusted with important tasks. For a time, the civil servants and imperial censors who were on friendly terms with the crown prince found their positions precarious and did not dare to act rashly. Let alone intercede for the imperial consort, these people didn't even know why she was being punished.

Opinions varied widely both within and without the palace as to what actually happened that day, but only a few people knew the truth; including the palace maid named Wu Ya. Later, Lin Qingyu learned about the whole thing from Xi Rong.

The Empress had been ordered to investigate the case of the Princess Jingchun. No clues could be found inside the palace, so they could only continue their investigation outside. Princess Jingchun entered the palace ten

years ago. Most of the maids of the Shangyi Bureau at that time had already left the palace to marry. Wu Ya was one of them.

The Emperor placed such great import on this matter that he even threated the Empress' Phoenix seal, book and treasure. The Empress dared not be the slightest bit negligent. She handled everything herself, even Wu Ya's interrogation.

Wu Ya made no outright claim to Jingchun's identity, saying only that Jingchun had been different from other palace maids. Jingchun never got her period and no matter the season, always wore clothes with tall collars. Later, when she chanced upon Jingchun changing clothes, she discovered something on her throat that was unusual for a woman. She informed the female official who had been in charge at the time but the official insisted that she had seen it wrong and ordered her not to publicize this matter.

"So, the female official had been covering up for Jingchun?" The Empress said, "But she is a palace maid, how could she have the skill to deceive everyonoe?"

Wu Ya took out a purple palace sash. "After the Princess Jingchun got married, this servant was ordered to clean her room. In there, I found this. The material used for this sash is specially made for use of the palace. Only concubines and princes are allowed its use. This servant wanted to give this to niangniang. But unexpectedly, the Shangyi Bureau's female official in charge was suddenly

changed and this servant was served wth trumped-up charges, beaten and sent out of the palace."

The Empress took the palace sash and looked at it carefully. It seemed very familiar, "This style of palace sash was popular in the palace for a period of time a decade ago. It's rarely seen now."

The sharp-eyes Lai Fu said, "The Crown Prince, the palace sash attached to his jade pendant is exactly the same as this one – they should be a pair!"

The Empress' face grew grave and she repeatedly confirmed, "Are you certain you recognize this clearly?"

"The Crown Prince wears that jade pendant to the Fengyi Palace every day when he pays his respects to niangniang. This servant cannot be mistaken."

"Alright…alright." The Empress couldn't hide her excitement, "Ready the carriage, I will go to see the Emperor."

Wu Ya then said, "Niangniang! Niangniang, there is another matter but this servant is uncertain whether to tell of it or not."

The Empress said impatiently, "What other clues do you have?"

"Niangniang mentioned His Highness and this servant rememerbed that it had been the Princess Jingchun who was tasked with delivering His Highness' brush, ink, paper, and inkstones in the palace. This servant once saw the two of

them in the palace, talking in the Imperial Garden. He mentioned something about when they were children in Changsheng Temple…"

A light flashed in Lai Fu's mind. "When the Crown Prince was young, he once stayed in Changsheng Temple for a period of time with Concubine Chen in order to avoid illness. Could that have anything to do with it? Niangniang, please don't be impatient. It's not too late to report to the Emperor once this matter has been investigated thoroughly."

Soon, there was news from Changsheng Temple. According to the monks in the temple, when the Crown Prince stayed in Changsheng Temple to avoid illness, aside from the palace maids and eunuchs, he had been accompanied by two young children of similar age. One of them was the little guard sent by the Heavenly Prison Sect, Shen Huaishi; the other was a young monk adopted by the temple. He had left home and joined the temple at the young age. He was a young boy who loved to laugh and easily endeared others to him. Despite their differing identities, the three of them often played and spent time together. They could even be called childhood friends.

Later, the little monk's biological parents came to the temple asking for the boy's return. The Empress followed this clue and found that the little monk's father had a gambling addiction and the reason why he wanted the little monk back was to sell him into the palace as a eunuch. Who would have thought that after the little monk entered the palace, no information of him could be found.

The Empress ordered the Si Lijian to investigate as to the whereabouts of this monk but they turned up empty-handed.

After investigating this far, the Empress could sit still no longer. Bringing with her testimonies and physical evidence, she sought an audience with the Emperor.

“After Jingchun entered the palace, he turned from a little eunuch to a palace maid. If it weren’t ties of kinship or friendship, who would risk death to help him.” The Empress said, “As for these ties, while he was in the palace, the only people he knew were Shen Huaishi and the Crown Prince. At that time, Shen Huaishi was completely obedient to the Crown Prince… Your Majesty, the Crown Prince cannot escape responsibility regarding this matter with Jingchun.”

The Emperor listened to the whole story. He looked at the palace sash and was silent for a while. He then said, “Summon Concubine Chen.”

The Empress was taken aback: “Your Majesty?”

The Emperor said coldly, “Go quickly.”

Concubine Chen was taken to Qinzheng Hall. Before the proof that was sturdy as a mountain, she could not argue for her son. Like a flower losing color, she knelt in the main hall and said tearfully, “It was this concubine, everything was my doing. When I was in Changsheng Temple, I had grown fond of the lovable and lovely Jingchun. I couldn’t bear to see him suffer through the purification

and so did such a foolish thing. But chenqie never could have expected that the King of the North would take a fancy to Jingchun…Your Majesty, chenqie did not do it intentionally. Your Majesty!"

The Empress slammed her hand down onto the table and stood up. "Nonsense! Concubine, do you think your failure to teach your son properly is not grave enough that you now intend to deceive the Emperor!"

"Everything chengqie said is true." Concubine Chen's tears were like raindrop on a pear blossom; magnificent no longer but without the slightest hesitation, "That palace sash was rewarded by chenqie to Jingchun. Like the one used by the Crown Prince, they both came from chenqie's palace. They were originally a pair but the Crown Prince did not know about it."

"Many times, the maids of the Shangyi Bureau have seen the Crown Prince and Jingchun meeting in private. How do you explain this?!"

Concubine Chen, sobbing and sniffling, said, "Princess Jingchun is as beautiful as a flower. Back then, she was the greatest beauty of the capital. That the Crown Prince give her preferential treatment is but human nature. After she was betrothed to the King of the North, the Crown Prince had no more contact with her."

"You are making irresponsible remarks! This matter of Jingchun's concerns the safety of the North. I ask the Emperor to render fair judgement!" The Empress was already furious to the utmost, otherwise it would not be have been

difficult for her to see that the Emperor intended to take Xiao Cheng away from this matter.

“Enough.” The Emperor closed his eyes and said, “From now on, Chen Shi will be deprive her of the title of Imperial Consort and banished to the cold palace. This is the end of the matter.”

Hearing Xi Rong’s recounting of what had happened, Lin Qingyu was not surprised at all. “Sure enough, the Emperor still doesn’t want to touch Xiao Cheng unless as a last resort.”

“Concubine Chen had taken great pains to protect her son. But as everyone knows, mother and son share the same glory and share the same loss. Concubine Chen has been banished and Xiao Cheng has lost the Emperor’s regard. One log cannot prop up a tottering building. How long will they be

able to last?" Gu Fuzhou said with a smile. , "Qingyu, we've done something bad again."

Lin Qingyu smiled. The feeling of two people doing bad things together is much better than doing it alone.

The author has something to say: This chapter is a double update, and the debt of 11W has been paid off.

I know that you don't like to watch drama chapters QAQ, so finally I attach a mini-theater of the great beauty transmigrating to the modern world. (continued from the previous mini-theater)

Classmate Jiang, who lost his memory of transmigrating, received a text message and reported it as a scam. Then the stranger sent another message: [Photo] Your wife looks like this.

Classmate Jiang: Bro, this photoshopped picture is just too much.

A stranger sent a video call. Classmate Jiang picked it up and the face of the great beauty appeared on the screen.

The great beauty frowned, uneasiness and fear in his eyes: …Lao Gong?

Classmate Jiang: Yeah… where are you?

Chapter 81

Chen Guifei was banished and the crown prince was beaten severely by the emperor. It could be said that the entire court in such a strained state that it would jump at the sighing of the wind or the call of a crane. After Lin Qingyu achieved his goal, he temporarily pulled back and lay low, not going anywhere save for the palace. On normal days, he would read books at the General's Mansion, make drugs, and raise Gu.

As early as when he decided to support a new emperor, he began to raise Gu. This was so that when the right time came, he could coerce the Emperor and command the ministers. This Gu was different from the ordinary Southern Border Poisonous Gu. It needed to be able to escape the detection of other imperial physicians. The imperial physicians in the Imperial Hospital each had their merits, escaping their scrunity would not be an easy task. Lin Qingyu tried several times and the Gu diead batch after batch. But finally, he bore some results this spring.

It was a Southern Border female scorpion, only about the size of a little finger but it had passed five passes and slayed six captains, rising above all the other mixed-breed Gu. She will quietly burrow into the human body to lay eggs

while the person is sleeping. And it will be these Gu eggs that would be the planted Gu.

Lin Qingyu threw himself into raising the Gu. The first thing he did when he woke up was to check the Gu's condition, leaving him with no time to send Gu Fuzhou to court. When Gu Fuzhou returned to the mansion, there was no beautiful wife to greet him. He went looking to the study and saw Lin Qingyu holding a small and dainty pair of tweezers, feeding bit by bit the little Gu with specially made minced meat. Gentle, patient, and attentive; completely oblivious to his husband's return.

Gu Fuzhou felt a little like laughing. The last time he was hand fed by Lin Qingyu was back when he was Lu Wancheng. He hadn't enjoyed this sort of benefit for such a long time but this little Gu suddenly had a great beauty feeding her.

He coughed lightly to announce his presence. Lin Qingyu didn't even lift his head, continuing with his task, "You're back."

Gu Fuzhou pulled carelessly, untying the clasp on the collar of the official uniform. He sat down beside Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu was facing the table,

while he was leaning against it. Tilting his head to look at Lin Qingyu, he said, “I’m hungry.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Go to the cook if you’re hungry. I can’t cook.”

Gu Fuzhou choked. He turned around and placed his chin on Lin Qingyu’s shoulder. “I want to eat with you.”

“I’m very busy.” With Gu Fuzhou’s added weight, Lin Qingyu found it difficult to control his right hand and feeding the little Gu was a delicate job. Gu Fuzhou was in the way, so Lin Qingyu shoo-ed him away, “Eat by yourself first. Don’t get in the way of my work here.”

Gu Fuzhou looked at the ugly little bug that was eating happily in the jar and couldn’t help but feel sad. “If I get the chance to be reborn once again, I’ll just transfer straight into this thing. All it does is eat and sleep all day and when it eats, its even got a great beauty to feed it. Now, look at me, I discuss government affairs, lift weights. I wake up early every day and sleep late at night. I’m dog-tired. But the life of a pampered Gu, now, that’s the life.”

Lin Qingyu finally looked straight at him and said, displeased, “Don’t say such foolish nonsense. You’re not going to be reborn again.”

To be reborn, one must die first. Gu Fuzhou realized that he had said the wrong thing and accidentally touched the matter Lin Qinyu was concerned about the most. He immediately changed the topic, “By the way, Qingyu, I have already ordered for that former palace maid named Wu Ya to be housed in a

courtyard out in the open. I also have some of my most trusted guards watching over it secretly. Now, we wait and see when Xiao Cheng comes sniffing to her door."

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. "The Emperor too will soon be finished."

In the fall of last year, he was the one who had brought the dying Emperor back from the gates of hell. Now that Xiao Cheng had nearly reached his end, the Emperor was going to outlive his usefulness; it was time for him to report back to the gates of hell.

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly at the little Gu. "Child, you must work hard for your father."

Gu Fuzhou: "…"

Lin Qingyu loved the little Gu so much that he almost forgot that he had a husband who had just professed his love to. Gu Fuzhou once suspected that Lin Qingyu might take that porcelain jar with him to bed. Fortunately, Lin Qingyu wasn't that dramatic. Gu Fuzhou could also understand this kind of behavior. Lin Qingyu had devoted countless efforts to raising this Gu. Immeasurable blood, sweat and tears had been exchanged for it. Just like an academic researcher in his world, finally showing results after so much hardship, it was only natural that it would be protected like a treasure.

On this day, as Lin Qingyu was feeding the little Gu so chicken blood, he accidentally splashed chicken blood on his hands. He disliked this smell and

immediately got up to clean his hands. When he returned, he found that he had forgotten to put the lid back on and the porcelain altar was now empty.

In an instant, Lin Qingyu's heart clenched and he barely managed to maintain his composure. It only took a moment for him to clean his hands, the little Gu couldn't' have crawled far. She was definitely still in this room. He searched every nook and cranny. But the Gu was too small, the slightest carelessness and it could easily be missed.

Lin Qingyu was about to call a servant to come in and look with him when from out the corner of his eye, he suddenly caught a glimpse of a black spot crawling near the door. He breathed a sigh of relief and took the porcelain jar

to bring back this little runaway. Just as success was in sight, a leg came into view—

“Young Master, what would like for the evening meal?”

Lin Qingyu watched helplessly as the Gu that he had raised with all his efforts disappeared under the sole of Huan Tong’s shoe. His face turned pale and he froze in on the spot.

Huan Tong had no idea that he had just stepped on the Young Master’s “child”. He asked, “Young Master?”

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes. As though if he couldn’t see it, it couldn’t be true.

Seeing that Lin Qingyu didn’t speak, Huan Tong became more and more uneasy, “Young Master, what’s the matter?”

Lin Qingyu has always been able to restrain his emotions, and this time was no exception. He was calm when he spoke. “You trampled my Gu to death.”

“Ah!” Huan Tong instinctively took a big step back and he saw the corpse of a scorpion where he had been standing just now. Huan Tong knew the

importance of this Gu and his voice trembled with fright, “Young Master, I-I didn’t mean to. I didn’t know it was there.”

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and looked at the motionless little Gu. He sighed softly.

Huan Tong knelt down with a thud. “Young Master, it’s all my fault. Punish me! Fine me thirty big lashes and deduct me a month’s… No, three months’ salary. Don’t be sad……”

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “Forget about the punishment. Just collect her corpse. Her corpse is also poisonous, so be careful.”

Huan Tong wrapped the body of the little Gu with a handkerchief and buried it under a tree in the back garden. After doing this, he returned to the study.

He saw Lin Qingyu reading the book as if nothing had happened. He cautiously leaned over. “Young Master.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Have you dealt with it?”

“Yes,” Huan Tong whispered, “Young Master, I’ll go to Steward Yuan to get my thirty lashes.”

“No need.”

“But that was the Gu you raised with so much hardship. Do you really not mind?”

“This is the end of the matter. What’s the use of getting mad?” Lin Qingyu said calmly, “The Gu is already dead. She won’t come back even if I resent and punish you.”

Huan Tong felt ashamed: “Young Master, I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine. You’re not completely to blame for this.

Lin Qingyu has always been protective of his and his people’s shortcomings. He may regard people he consider insignificant with contempt but he has always been a little soft-hearted towards his own people. Furthermore, if he

hadn't forgotten to put the lid back on, the Gu wouldn't have been trampled to death by Huan Tong. The responsibility for this was on him.

After that, Huan Tong kept observing Lin Qingyu. Seeing that he wasn't acting any different than usual, he finally relaxed a bit.

As time for the evening meal approached, someone announced from outside, "The General has returned." Lin Qingyu put down the medical book and strode out of the study.

Gu Fuzhou had just stepped into the yard and he saw his beautiful wife hurriedly walking towards him, even running the last few steps. This made him quite flattered and the exhaustion of the entire day was swept clean away.

Lin Qingyu stood in front of him. "You're back."

Gu Fuzhou knew something was wrong as soon as he saw Lin Qingyu's expression. "Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu looked at Gu Fuzhou, who had a concerned expression on his face. He couldn't keep his calm any longer and said softly, "The little Gu is dead."

There was a hint of grievance in his tone.

Gu Fuzhou realized the seriousness of the problem. He first took the fragile

beauty into his arms and then asked, “What happened?”

“I forgot to put the lid back on and she climbed out of the jar to the floor. Then…” Lin Qingyu’s voice trembled slightly, “then she was trampled to death by Huan Tong.”

Gu Fuzhou felt momentarily distressed. He stroked Lin Qingyu’s hair with his broad hand. “It’s okay, it’s okay. I’ll help you find a way – this time you won’t even need to call me ‘Lao Gong’. I’ll help you think of something. Don’t be sad.”

Lin Qingyu buried his face in Gu Fuzhou’s chest. Gu Fuzhou had gone to cavalry camp this afternoon. He was wearing icy armor, a perfect match to his mood at this moment.

“What can you do?” Lin Qingyu complained, “Dead is dead. She can’t be saved anymore. It took a whole month before I was able to raise her to such a size and she was gone with a single step.”

Gu Fuzhou said, “Then let’s raise another one?”

“That’s easy to say. You know yourself how many times I tried before I was able to breed one successfully.”

This matter truly was difficult. Gu Fuzhou didn’t care much; the top priority was to coax the beauty first. Lin Qingyu had no appetite so Gu Fuzhou

accompanied him to starve. He took Lin Qingyu back to the bedroom and sent all the servants away.

Lin Qingyu sat blankly at the table. With no outsiders present, he had no need to restrain his emotions. In front of Gu Fuzhou, he could always act without any restraint.

Gu Fuzhou stared at Lin Qingyu under the lights. Lin Qingyu was really sad; the corners of his eyes were even a little red. In front of others, he was calm and self-restrained. But at the moment, the ruthless beauty who poisons and harms people, unexpectedly looked pitiful.

Lin Qingyu was a little uncomfortable being stared at by him. He said, “What are you looking at me for?”

Gu Fuzhou said leisurely: “Huo Qubing was named a marquis at the age of seventeen, Sun Ce dominated the lower reaches of the Chang Jiang River at the

age of eighteen and our Doctor Lin, because of the death of the little Gu he raised, lost his temper and refused to eat at the age of twenty."

Lin Qingyu said: "Do you think you're being funny again?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Well, I can't be depressed with you. If I'm as depressed as you are, who'll coax you?"

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes: "You can still laugh?"

"I'm also very sad when the little Gu died but the Gu won't come back to life, so you and I will have to start accepting it." Gu Fuzhou guided patiently, "You must eat well. If you don't eat, where will you get the energy to plot murder?"

"I know." Lin Qingyu was expressionless, "but I just don't want to eat right now."

Gu Fuzhou took out his trump card. "Then how about I let you rub your face against my abs?"

Lin Qingyu glanced at him, "You're playing the same game again."

"It's still cold and yet I'm willing to take off my clothes to let you bury your face against my abs and you're saying that's not enough?" Gu Fuzhou paused,

“Or how about I let you play with the General’s little tongue?”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows lightly. “Play? How?”

Caught off guard, a kiss was suddenly planted on his lips. He heard Gu Fuzhou say, “How do you want to play with it, Doctor Lin?”

The number of times the two have made out wasn’t that many and Lin Qingyu was not yet fully accustomed to this kind of touch. His heart skipped a beat and he unconsciously stepped back. Gu Fuzhou’s palm supported the back of his head, preventing him from evading.

Lin Qingyu suddenly met his eyes. They were as bright as stars, dazzling, reflecting his face.

Lin Qingyu was dazed and he heard a chuckle. When Gu Fuzhou bowed his head to reach him, Yuan Yin’s voice came from outside, “General, Madam, there’s been movement at Wu Ya’s place.”

The author has something to say: After going through a plot-heavy chapter, here’s daily life chapter =w=

Chapter 82.1

There was a small house in the western side of the capital city, only one street away from the bustling Yongxing Street. Just after midnight, a sedan chair stopped at the door of the house. A man dressed as a guard lifted the curtain of the sedan chair and helped down the person inside. “Your Highness.”

Xiao Cheng coughed. He asked, “Have you investigated thoroughly?”

“Yes, Your Highness. Wu Ya, the former servant from the Shangyi Bureau, lives here.”

Xiao Chen looked at the closed door and his eyes darkened. “Let’s go in.”

It was long past curfew and ordinary people were already sleeping peacefully. It was a moonless windy night. A faint light came from inside the house, casting a thin silhouette on the window; a silhouette that seemed to have been waiting for Xiao Cheng for a long time.

Reason told Xiao Cheng that this was most likely a trap. But right now, he didn’t care at all about anything else. Even if it was a trap, for a clue as to Shen Huaishi’s whereabouts, he had to jump into it. Fortunately, he brought a group of guards with him tonight. If the one inside this house wanted to assassinate

him, it would a task more difficult that climbing to Heaven. He had nothing to worry about.

Xiao Cheng motioned for the guard to open the door. The two guards. one hand on the hilt of their swords, pushed the door open. Amidst the silence, the creaking of the door was particularly grating.

They were met with the sight of a man in white, standing in the room with the light behind him; with a beautiful appearance but a temperament as clear as icy jade. He bowed towards Xiao Cheng. “Your Highness.”

Xiao Cheng’s eyes deepened. “Cough… it’s you, Lin Qingyu.”

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly and said mockingly, “Why does Your Highness no longer call me ‘Little Qingyu’?”

Xiao Chen raised his hand. “All of you, step back.”

A guard hesitated. “Your Highness…”

Maybe it was due to the damage left by Shen Huashi’s sword or because he heard Lin Qingyu’s mocking tone, despite how pale Xiao Cheng’s face was, he did not forget to display a confident smirk. “He is nothing more than a doctor

without even the strenght to truss a chicken. Does it look like he can thrust another sword through Gu's chest? You can just wait outside."

After the guards withdrew, only Lin Qingyu and Xiao Cheng were left in the room. Xiao Cheng stared straight at Lin Qingyu's face. He used to be tempted by Lin Qingyu's eyes that looked so much like Jingchun's. But now he realized how ridiculous he had been.

The man in front of him was scheming, sinister and trecherous. The only things that lay hidden beaneath that peerless face was schemes and calculations. Didn't Lin Qingyu's presense her now signify that he had been the driving force behind everything?

How could such a person be like Jingchun?

Lin Qingyu said, "His Highness seems to have something to ask me."

Xiao Cheng said, forcing out each word, "The palace sash that Wu Ya presented is not Jingchun's."

There were three of these palace sashes in total. One for himself and the other two, he gave to Shen Huaishi and Jingchun as evidence of their childhood friendship.

They had met in Changsheng Temple — a noble prince, a bodyguard from a shadow guard organization and a motherless fatherless little monk. The three had very different personalities — the prince was arrogant and contemptuous,

the guard was loyal and honest and the little monk was guileless and innocent. Their identities were vastly different, they never should have crossed paths much less become close. His concubine mother had even instructed him, saying he would crown prince someday and then emperor and an emperor had no need for friends. But at that time, he had been too young. No matter how accomplished, he was nothing more than a child after all.

The time he spent in Changsheng Temple as a child, sheltering from illness, was the most relaxed and content he had ever been in this life. He didn't have have to fight and scheme against his half-brothers; he didn't have to remained solemn and composed in front of his Imperial mother; he didn't have to wrack his brains thinking of ways to gain his father's favor. He was just a child from an ordinary family with two good friends he got along with.

Once it was safe to return, he and Shen Huaishi bid farewell to Jingchun and returned to the palace. As a prince, he couldn't leave the palace, but Shen Huaishi could. Every time he went out of the palace, he would go to Changsheng Temple to visit Jingchun and sometimes he would bring back the letters that Jingchun wrote to him. Until one day, Shen Huaishi couldn't find

Jingchun in Changsheng Temple. After inquiring, he found out that Jingchun had been found by his biological parents and brought home.

The sea of people is vast. It wasn't easy two younglings to find Jingchun. Neither he nor Shen Huaishi thought that the next time they would see Jingchun, it would be in the palace.

A group of young newly selected palace eunuchs were lined up outside the Si Lijian, waiting for the old eunuch to purify their bodies. When Shen Huaishi was passing by, he heard a familiar sob and stopped to look, only to see His and His Highness's good friend, wearing tattered clothes, tears running down his face, nose red from crying.

Shen Huaishi rescued Jingchun and took him to find Xiao Cheng. The rules in the palace were strict and there was no room for people of dubious origin. Xiao Cheng wanted to send Jingchun out of the palace but Jingchun buried himself in Shen Huaizhi's arms, crying until he was out of breath. He said that he didn't want to leave the palace, let alone go home and be beaten by his father. He wanted to stay in the palace with two friends.

Eunuchs had their bodies checked periodically. Jingchun could only escape once but not forever. The two couldn't bear to let Jingchun get castrated so Xiao Cheng used some means to have Jingchun replace a little palace maid who had suddenly died of illness. The Young Xiao Cheng had no idea he had

planted a seed for immeasurable trouble in the future and he had even felt smug about his meticulous arrangement.

Since then, the friendship between the three of them continued in the palace. Year after year, quietly, gradually, it deteriorated.

As he grew, he did everything to secure the position of crown prince. The Heavenly Prison Sect was loyal and devoted to him but he was ready to discard them when told to do so. However, the one thing he couldn't let go of was that childhood friendship.

Because of their devotion to him, his father wanted to destroy the entire Heavenly Prison Sect. He planned everything and even though, because of Shen Huaishi, his heart softened and he hesitated in the end, he hadn't stopped it from happening. Fortunately, he managed to rescue Shen Huaishi. But it was because of his soft-hearted hesitation, that his father became quite dissatisfied with him. So that when Jingchun's hand in marraige was asked by the King of the North, he could do nothing.

He thought countless times, if he hadn't saved Shen Huaishi's life, would he have been able to keep Jingchun by his side?

Strangely, no matter how many times he thought about it, he never regretted his decision.

On the eve of Jing Chun's marriage, the three met in secret. Jingchun hugged him and Shen Huaishi with tears in his eyes. He tightly held the palace sash,

the symbol of their childhood friendship, and said that he would kill himself before the King of the North found out that he was a boy; he would not even leave behind a body to be found. In this way, they would not be implicated and the Dayu and the Northern Border would not fight because of him.

On the day of Jing Chun's marriage, he saw with his own eyes, Jingchun wearing that palace sash as he was married away to the Northern Border. Later, he learned from the Tianji Camp that Jingchun was doing well and the King of the North doted him in every possible way. However, he didn't know whether Jingchun had already revealed his identity. Thus, this matter became a heavy stone that could overwhelm him at any time. Only by ascending the throne as soon as possible could he, once this matter comes to light, protect himself and Shen Huaishi.

The palace sash that Wu Ya took out wasn't Jingchun's, nor was it his. So, it could only be Shen Huaishi's. After Jingchun left, Shen Huaishi grew

withdrawn, pouring his all into handling matter for him. The only person he had had any dealings with was Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu… knew Shen Huaishi's whereabouts.

Xiao Cheng's eyes were burning, as though to see right through the person in front of him. "Where is he?"

Lin Qingyu shook his head. "I don't know."

"Stop it with your drivel!" Xiao Cheng's breathing quickened, "If you haven't seen him, how did you come by that palace sash?"

"What is His Highness talking about?" Lin Qingyu said, "The palace sash was found by Wu Ya in his room after the Princess Jingchun got married."

A sinister smile appeared on Xiao Cheng's face. "You may be able to deceive others, but you cannot deceive Gu. Jingchun took his palace sash with him to the Northern Border. Even if you had a direct access to the highest authority,

you would be able to get your hands on his. The one you gave to Wu Ya is Shen Huaishi's."

Lin Qingyu smiled as well. "Your Highness says it with such certainty. Then, why don't tell this to the Emperor; having him punish me for my crime of deceiving the Emperor."

Xiao Cheng gritted his teeth. "Lin Qingyu…!"

Lin Qingyu's face was resplendent but his smile contained an indescribable sense of cunning. "Oh right, Concubine Chen… No, I should call her Chen Shi now. Chen Shi has pleaded guilty, repeatedly saying that this matter was her doing and that His Highness had no knowledge of what she did. If you go His Majesty to expose me, you will also be exposing yourself as an insider. Now, wouldn't that be a waste of Chen Shi's hard work?"

The taste of blood began to seep into Xiao Cheng's mouth. He wanted nothing more than to hack to pieces this poisonous beauty, snap his bones and scatter

his ashes. His pale lips was stained scarlet and he said coldly, “I’ll ask you one more time – where is Shen Huaishi?”

“And I’ll answer your Highness again. Your Highness should listen carefully.” Lin Qingyu said, “I do not know where he is. This palace sash was brought to me by someone else.”

Xiao Cheng’s chest heaved violently: “Impossible!”

“Why would that be impossible?” Lin Qingyu stepped forward. Clucking his tongue, he said, “How does Your Highness think I found out the truth? His sword was unable to take your life. Neither was he able to take away your

position as crown prince. Then he can only think of some other way, don't you think?"

"Hold your tongue!" Xiao Chen coughed violently, his eyes going bloodshot. "No matter how much Shen Huaishi hates me, he would never genuinely wish to take my life!"

Things having reached this point, Xiao Cheng has even forgotten he refer to himself with his respectful honorific. He must not be far from completely losing control.

Lin Qingyu gave a breathy sneer. It seemed he now had his answer as to whether Shen Huaishi missed that day due to a slip of the hand or due to his going soft-hearted.

"This palace sash was indeed voluntarily handed over to me by Imperial Guard Shen. Imperial Guard Shen is extremely skilled and an expert at concealing himself. Even the Tianji Camp is unable to find his whereabouts. A mere doctor without even the strength to truss a chicken couldn't possibly have forced him to hand that over." With eyes so similar to Jingchun's, Lin Qingyu stared coldly at this "protagonist" wrapped in his halo. "You said he would never genuinely wish to take your life, but it was because of his sword that you have grown so weak. You're even worse off than the late Young Master Hou. So, in the end, was he being soft-hearted or cruel?"

Xiao Cheng's eyes were wide open. His once charming and handsome face had turned malevolent. His eyes, before frivolous and fickle, now held only intense

love and hatred.

Lin Qingyu smiled, “Perhaps, he truly did not wish to kill you. You saved him. But the entire Heavely Prison Sect died because of you. After you saved him, did you treat him kindly? You treat him as your exclusive property, humiliated him in bed without restrain. And even out of bed, he had to risk his life to follow your orders. He suffered countless wounds, big and small, because of you. Several times, he came close to death. Granting you death with a single sword strike; where would be the fun in that? Watching you suffer all kinds of torment, opposed by all, deserted by your friends; abandoned by the Emperor, abandoned by Dayu; being reduced to mere trash. Wouldn’t this be more enjoyable?!”

Xiao Cheng couldn’t control his legs from taking a step back. He leaned against the room’s pillar. His lips trembling, he said, stricken with terror, “No…he-he can’t…”

“What is the truth, I have already told His Highness.” Lin Qingyu said calmly, “It is His Highness’s choice whether to believe it or not.”

Xiao Cheng’s face turned purple. He raised his eyes, looking at the teardrop mole at the corner of Lin Qingyu’s eye. He murmured, a trickle of blood

escaping from the corner of his mouth. “Gu-guards…” Blood continued to flow from out his mouth, soaking the four-toed python on his chest, “Guards!”

The guards waiting outside the door heard the sound of movement and rushed in immediately. “Your Highness!”

Two of the guards supported Xiao Cheng on his left and right. A third person drew his sword and put it on Lin Qingyu’s shoulder. “You outrageous assassin! What have you done to His Highness!”

Lin Qingyu looked down at Xiao Cheng from above and said, “If you hurt me in the slightest, you will never see him again in this life.”

Xiao Chen closed his eyes. “…Return to the palace.”

Lin Qingyu showed a dry smile. “Take care, Your Highness. Forgive me for not seeing you off.”

It was past the third watch. Gu Fuzhou had been waiting quietly in the side room, listening to the entire of their big play. He knew that tonight there

would only be a battle of words; there would be no violence. However, just in case, he surrounded had surrounded the residence with his trusted guards.

He had been a little uneasy when the guards broke in. But his wife was truly worthy of being his wife. With just a few words, he managed to escape unscathed.

Lin Qingyu pushed open the door to the side room and Gu Fuzhou greeted him with a yawn. “All done?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Xiao Cheng vomited blood.”

Spitting up blood was a grave matter. After he started vomiting blood back then, his body deteriorated rapidly and within a few months, he died right before Lin Qingyu’s eyes.

Gu Fuzhou took off his cloak and put it on Lin Qingyu. He placed his hand gently Lin Qingyu’s hair. “Then let’s head home.”

84

Chapter 82.2

After Xiao Cheng returned to the Eastern Palace, he fell gravely ill. Everyone thought that he must have received a huge psychological blow from Chen Shi's banishment to the cold palace. Although the crown prince has become a medicine jar since his "sudden illness" last year, the imperial physicians also said that so long as he rests at ease, he could still live for decades. This time, his internal energies had been so agitated that his old injury recurred and he fell into a coma. They were afraid that everything about his condition now pointed towards disaster.

With Xiao Cheng so ill, he could no longer manage the affairs of the state. The emperor ordered authority over the Tianji Camp taken from him. At this time, King Ning, Xiao Jie had been ordered to investigate Xixia's spies but he lacked the manpower to properly do so. Now, this shadow guard organization who worked themselves to the bone for the royal family came into Xiao Jie's hands.

Misfortune never comes singly. Dark and gloomy clouds hung over the Eastern Palace, while Qinzheng Hall had not seen the Son of Heaven for many days. As summer begun, the weather gradually turned hot. Not only did the emperor's condition not improve, rather, it became worse and worse. The entire Imperial Hospital, including Lin Qingyu, who had no official position,

was made to work round the clock due to these two personages' condition. And yet, they yielded no results.

The headaches tormented the emperor to the verge of death. He felt like there was a shovel in his head, delivering pound after pound against his brain. The emperor's groans reverberated in his bedchamber day and night. As it wore on, he eventually lost even the strength to moan.

The imperial physicians were helpless and the emperor could only pin his hopes on Lin Qingyu. He hoped that Lin Qingyu could save him a second time and even granted him the position of Assistant Yuan Pan of the Imperial Hospital. Lin Qingyu lived up to his expectations and prescribed him a new medicine. After the emperor took it, sure enough, his headaches subsided. However, what followed was long periods of drowsiness. He was in a daze all day long and every time he woke up, he would be so confused he couldn't even tell day from night — He now seemed beyond feeling any pain.

Lin Rushan, as the Yuan Pan of the Imperial Hospital, could tell what medicine the emperor was taking. He found Lin Qingyu and said hesitantly, "Qingyu, the medicine you gave His Majesty…"

Lin Qingyu said, "His Majesty said that he didn't want to hurt anymore and I made it so that he wouldn't hurt. I'm followed the imperial edict. There is no need for Father to worry."

Lin Rushan still worried nonetheless. "Do you really know what you're doing? The Crown Prince and Chen Shi will say nothing of it. But if the Empress and

King Ning were to find out, would they allow you to do this?"

Lin Qingyu smiled reassuringly, "Father, do not worry. I have thought this through. You can leave this matter alone."

Lin Rushan sighed. "Alright. I have never been able to control you. But be careful in everything."

The emperor and the crown prince fell ill one after the other. The heavy responsibility of supervising the country naturally fell on the shoulders of King Ning. In the past, Xiao Jie was nothing but a pillow with an embroidered case. His birth mother was low humble; he himself had no talent or virtue. No one would have imagined that one day the Dayu would be under his control. The ministers who were close to Xiao Cheng were defiant at first but he proved himself ever more capable at each task the emperor assigned. They had no choice but to accept it.

Kept busy by state affiars, Xiao Jie had not returned to King Ning's mansion for many days. He took Xi Rong to stay with him in the side hall of Qinzheng Hall. While managing the country, he did not forget to serve his imperial father in his illness and to pay his respects to his imperial mother. After a few months, Xiao Jie gained a reputation not only for being a hardworking ruler but also a loyal and filial son.

On this day, Lin Qingyu was invited by King Ning to Qinzheng Hall. The messenger said that King Ning suddenly felt unwell and asked him to take a look. When he arrived at the side hall of Qinzheng Hall, he saw Xiao Jie lying

over the desk and sleeping soundly, a pen held slack in his hand. There was even a spot of ink on his nose.

Lin Qingyu said softly, “Your Highness?”

Xi Rong’s voice came from behind him. “Doctor Lin, you’re here.”

Lin Qingyu turned around and looked. During this period, he and Xi Rong met frequently in the palace. Compared to when he was in the King’s Mansion, Xi Rong was now several times busier. However, he showed no tiredness at all. Instead, his face was bright and radiant. He seems to be enjoying every day.

Lin Qingyu laughed inexplicably. Xi Rong personally poured him a cup of tea and asked politely, “What is Imperial Physician Lin laughing at?

“It’s funny, Steward Xi and the General are two extremes.” Lin Qingyu took the tea handed by Xi Rong, “The busier Steward Xi is, the more excited he is. If it were that one from my family, I’m afraid it wouldn’t even be two days before he’s already complaining loudly and washing his hands of the entire thing.”

A strange expression quickly flashed in Xi Rong’s eyes. Lin Qingyu’s mention of ‘that one from my family’, had he said it offhand or did he mean something more by it?

“General Gu has been working for the country and the peace of the Northwest for a long time. In order to let the general rest easy, the prince has already

excused him from attending the daily morning court." Xi Rong said with a smile, "Or, does Imperial Physician Lin have any other requests?"

"No, that's fine." Lin Qingyu looked at Xiao Jie, "Steward Xi, is it alright to let His Highness sleep like this? Although it's summer, it's still cold in the mornings and evenings. His Highness can scarce afford to fall ill at this time."

"Imperial Physician Lin, please wait a moment."

Xi Rong walked to Xiao Jie, leaned over and carried him in his arms. Xiao Jie woke up. Seeing Xi Rong's face, he dazedly called out "A'Rong". Xi Rong said warmly, "I'll take you to the bedroom to sleep."

Xiao Jie nodded and put his arms around Xi Rong's neck, closing his eyes again.

Xi Rong settled Xiao Jie and returned to the side hall. He apologized to Lin Qingyu, "Imperial Physician Lin, I am sorry to have kept you waiting."

Lin Qingyu had already drunk half of a cup of tea. "If Steward Xi has something he needs to say, please tell me."

The two of them each took what they needed and they have been in alliance for a long time. Xi Rong said, "His Highness has been supervising the country for a while, I wonder if Imperial Physician Lin finds things satisfactory?"

"Steward Xi's words are interesting." Lin Qingyu said, "Whether things are

satisfactory or not, should you not ask His Majesty? What are you asking me for?""

Xi Rong said with a smile, "Then who does Imperial Physican Lin think suitable to express these words?"

Lin Qingyu looked up at him. "What do you mean?"

"We need someone to step out. Best it be a civil minister trusted by His Majesty, a middleman who is not too close to either the Crown Prince or King Ning." Xi Rong said, "His Majesty's illness worsens by the day. The times he is awake grow less and less. I hope that while His Majesty is lucid, he might give His Highness proper title. Imperial Physician Lin is of exceptional intelligence; you should understand my meaning."

Lin Qingyu said slowly, "Steward Xi has been lying dormant for many years, why are you losing patience now?"

Xi Rong was dressed in huafu; he was obviously a eunuch and yet he seemed to born a cut above the rest, more like a prince than Xiao Jie. "It is because I have

been dormant for many years and have waited for too long that I do not wish to wait now."

Lin Qingyu said, "More haste, less speed. Steward Xi, keep calm. Do not be impatient."

Xi Rong bowed and saluted with modesty and respect. "In this case, I would like to thank Doctor Lin."

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou have been planning for a long time, each step was linked to another. Now, they were only one step away from achieving their goal. The proper title Xi Rong wanted was nothing more than an imperial edict stating the proper heir.

This was not difficult. Anyone with a discerning eye could see that the crown prince's party could no longer hold their heads above the wind and waves. Even if the emperor were to show consideration for their bond as father and son, leaving him as crown prince, how long could he remain seated on the throne given the condition of his body? Even if the Emperor were to depart first and the crown prince can ascend to the throne, how could a new emperor with a short life be able to hold steady this vast nation? Now, it was simply a matter of having someone sent a letter to the emperor urging for a change in heir.

Within the army, every soldier would respond from a single call from Gu Fuzhou. Though, it could be him who speaks out, if he were but a little careless, he might be charged with mutiny and forcing the emperor to

abdicate. Gossip is a fearful thing. Lin Qingyu cared not a whit about others, but he couldn't stand his husband being criticized. The best candidate was the one who had urged for Xiao Jie to be named king, the Nan'an Hou. Xi Rong was hinting at him to go to Nan'an Hou and urge him to write a memorial suggesting the change in heirs.

Xi Rong's impatience showed his ambition. On the other hand, at this time, Lin Qingyu was in no hurry. Now Xiao Jie was in charge of the country but behind Lin Qingyu were Gu Fuzhou and the empress, in his grasp was a seriously ill emperor. The two sides are evenly matched; thus, Xi Rong had the guts to instruct him to do things. When Xiao Jie becomes crown prince, with

time, his wings will grow. When that time comes, it will be but a dream if Lin Qingyu wished to be on equal footing with them.

It wasn't for this pair of half-brothers that he and Gu Fuzhou went to such great lengths to pull the emperor and his son into the water.

Lin Qingyu put down the tea cup, "I haven't finished speaking yet. What is Steward Xi thanking me for?"

Xi Rong raised his eyebrows and said, "Then Imperial Physician Lin means…?"

"I can give His Highness this proper title, but I have three conditions."

"Imperial Physician Lin, please do tell."

"One, I want command over Tianji Camp."

Xi Rong's expression changed slightly and he said with a feigned smile, "And?"

"Secondly, in addition to the imperial cavalry camp, the imperial guards in the palace are also to be under the command of General Gu." Lin Qingyu said, "Thirdly, if the prince succeeds in ascending the throne in the future, he is to

make the current Empress, the future Empress Dowager, hold court from behind a screen."

The smile faded from Xi Rong's face and he said slowly, "Imperial Physician Lin is so ambitious, why not be the emperor yourself?"

Lin Qingyu said, "You yourself call me 'Imperial Physician Lin'. How can a mere imperial physician aspire to the throne?"

Xi Rong said lightly, "I'm afraid Imperial Physician Lin does not speak truth."

"I have made my words clear. There is still time for Steward Xi and His Highness to consider it first before letting me know your decision." Lin Qingyu said, "But best not to make me and the General wait too long. A long

night is fraught with dreams. There might be a day when His Majesty wakes up. ”

Xi Rong watched Lin Qingyu walk to the door. He suddenly said, “Imperial Physician Lin, please wait. I have one more thing regarding which I would like to ask the Imperial Physician and the General of their plans.”

“What is it?”

“Princess Jingchun’s matter has been exposed in the north. Should the court execute a preemptive strike? As Dayu’s only king from a different clan, the King of the North has always been a hidden danger.”

“No, the current court is short of troops and provisions. It is only enough to deal with the war in the Northwest.” Lin Qingyu said, “As long as Jingchun is by King of the North’s side, the Northern Border will not invade the court.”

Xi Rong asked, “How does Imperial Physician Lin know this?”

Lin Qingyu made no comment. He had asked Gu Fuzhou the same thing and Gu Fuzhou told him:

If the story of Xiao Cheng and Shen Huaishi was a bucket of vomit-inducing swill of sadistic love, of picking up the pieces and starting anew, then the story of the King of the North and the Princess Jingchun was a sweet cookie of a

love story from beginning to end. For them, being in love together was the most important thing.

The author has something to say: Er Zhuang hold on! Strive to survive until the eleventh hour! ! !

Er Zhuang: Wait for me to call him baobei first before you send me offline.

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Chapter 83

Xi Rong didn't consider it for long and gave Lin Qingyu his answer. He agreed to Lin Qingyu's three conditions. He ordered someone to deliver the Tianji Camp's token to the General's mansion and as prince in charge of the supervision of the country, he entrusted Gu Fuzhou with the responsibility of guarding the capital.

"Isn't he a little too willing to agree?" Gu Fuzhou tapped the table with the Tianji Camp's token. "It doesn't seem like Xi Rong's style."

Lin Qingyu agreed, "He's definitely left himself a way out."

When he put forward those three conditions that day, he didn't actually expect Xi Rong to agree. Given Xi Rong's ambition, how could he stand being surrounded by wolves restraining his actions once Xiao Jie's ascends to the throne? Xi Rong's willingness to agree now was simply because he and Xiao Jie's position was unstable and for the time being, they could not do without the his and Gu Fuzhou's support. In his time once the time was right, if he

truly wanted to pull down the bridge after crossing the river, he could simply think up of a way.

“Don’t you have a way out yourself? –‘If Xiao Jie and Xi Rong won’t listen, then they’ll be replaced.’, these were your words.

Lin Qingyu looked at the token that could mobilize all of the Tianji Camp’s elite assassins. “The emperor only has so many sons. We’ve gotten rid of Xiao Cheng, if we replace Xiao Jie, there’s only one left.”

Gu Fuzhou was using the Tianji Camp token to tap out a rhythm. He said sleepily, “A dullard as emperor? It would simply be unreasonable.”

“I wouldn’t want to do anything unreasonable either. I hope Xi Rong would be more obedient and not force me to replace them. — Stop that tapping.” Lin Qingyu couldn’t bear it any longer, “Are your hands so empty that you simply can’t go without having anything to play with?”

Gu Fuzhou stopped and pretended to feel wronged. “We’re already dating, why is Doctor Lin still so fierce?”

Lin Qingyu said with a smile, “I’m only saying the truth, why is that being ‘fierce’?”

“I’m bored so naturally I’m going to find something to play with.” Gu Fuzhou said casually, “You won’t accompany me. All day long, you play around with medicine and politics. And yet you still find time to play around with my

feelings, Doctor Lin. Oh, I once again find myself envious of that love-addled couple in the North."

Lately, Lin Qingyu has been busy dealing with the different parties and truthfully didn't have time to play with Young Master Jiang's feelings. Gu Fuzhou no longer needed to go to morning court and he didn't go to the palace very often. On the other hand, Lin Qingyu went to the palace every day; even staying overnight at the Imperial Hospital when things were very busy. Gu Fuzhou has been spending many nights alone in that bunk bed and it was inevitable that he would have some complaints.

Lin Qingyu asked, "Why, you want to be love-addled as well?"

Gu Fuzhou shrugged. "How could I when love-addled isn't what Doctor Lin wants? I want to become Doctor Lin's type — a mature man."

Lin Qingyu teased, "Well, I count salted fish among my dislikes but it hasn't made you any more diligent."

"The only thing I can say to that is, it's a testament to my ability that despite my being salted fish, I have managed to make the Dayu's number one beauty

fall for me." Not only did Gu Fuzhou not feel any share, rather he was quite proud of it. "You like me already. It's too late for regrets."

Lin Qingyu sighed softly. "I've miscalculated."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Don't be like that. I may be salted fish but I support you in all your endeavors. You can proceed with all confidence and boldness. If something goes wrong, you can come to me and I will help you deal with the aftermath."

Lin Qingyu said, "I can't go to you unless something goes wrong? Didn't you say you're bored. If so, I have a lot of work for you to do."

"Forget it." Gu Fuzhou lay on the table and waved his hand, "Unless it's for you, I'd rather stay at home to get moldy than go to work."

Lin Qingyu raised his hand and gave a barely there touch to the shallow scar on Gu Fuzhou's forehead. "If you handle these things well for me, then I will have time to play around with your feelings."

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows. "Is this true? Then give me your written pledge."

Lin Qingyu laughed, "What would you like me to write?"

Gu Fuzhou brought out pen and paper. "Write down that after I'm done handling these matters for you, you have to stay with me at the mansion for an

entire day, twenty-four hours. One hour less and that doesn't count as a day."

A few days later, the civil and military officials discovered that the guards in the palace had quietly been changed. Most of these guards were unfamiliar faces. They patrolled the palace day and night in shifts. They guarded the eight palace gates, the twelve east and west palaces, the six bureaus and twenty-four divisions. Some busybodies went asking about and learned that the new batch of imperial guards had personally been selected and gathered by General Gu. Each and every one was loyal and devoted to the general.

At the same time, Xue Ying, the old eunuch who has been serving the emperor for many years, suddenly wished to retire and return home. As soon as he left, the eunuchs and maids of the emperor's palace were also changed. Now, Eunuch Lai Fu of Fengyi Palace was in charge.

The Empress waited all day long before the dragon bed. Though the other concubines and princesses wished to also serve the ill emperor, she tactfully turned them away, sending them back to the harem, saying that the emperor needed his rest and was not in any condition to see people. Both in court and in the inner palace, save for those of Fengyi Palace, the only other person who could see the emperor was Imperial Physician Lin of the Imperial Hospital.

Everyone knew that a great change in the palace was about to take place.

On this day, General Gu, who had not been in court for a long time, along with his wife, showed up at the Ministry of Revenue. The Nan'an Hou, who was then Minister of Revenue, personally received him. Among these civil

servants, Gu Fuzhou, dressed in the clothes of a military official, was particularly conspicuous. He even wore a sword around his waist.

Gu Fuzhou asked the others to withdraw for now, leaving them alone with the Nan'an Hou. Nan'an Hou said anxiously, "The General graces our minstry with his presence. What noble errand might have brought you here?"

The Nan'an Hou has been serving for many years and throughout all those years, he has never participated in party disputes. He served the emperor, his only support. Now that the emperor was seriously ill, his backer at the verge of collapse, he grew even more careful, overcaution in all matters big and small.

Whether the new emperor turns out to be the Crown Prince or King Ning, he would be able to keep his own glory.

Gu Fuzhou looked at the man he used to call “Father” now walking on thin ice and felt a little like laughing. “Master Hou has not seen my wife for a long time. Perhaps you would like to pay him your greetings?”

The Nan’an Hou’s expression froze. He, a noble of the highest rank, has fallen to a point that he had to pay his greetings to an imperial physician; not to mention that this imperial physician was once the male wife of his household.

Lin Qingyu said, “General, if we could kindly move on to business?”

“Alright.” Gu Fuzhou said, “This General has something I don’t understand and so I came here to ask the Nan’an Hou.”

Nan’an Hou said, “General, please feel free to ask.”

Gu Fuzhou found talking too tiring, so he handed over the right to speak to Lin Qingyu, “Madam.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Concubine Chen has been banished and the Crown Prince is seriously ill. King Ning has been supervising the country for a long time. As

such the General is wondering why, given the situation, has none of the civil servants come forward to declare their position."

The Nan'an Hou froze for a moment. Lin Qingyu has already made his views very clear. He had long had a hunch that this matter would fall on him. Previously, Lin Qingyu had threatened him with the matter of the illegal salt business to asked him to implore for the Fourth Prince's title as king. He thought that what the Fourth Prince was asking for was nothing more than the

position of a feudal king. Now, it was evident that Lin Qingyu had already at that time, set up a chess game and invited him into an urn.

Nan'an Hou said, voice cold, "The prime minister is the head of the civil ministers. Prime Minister Cui has yeet to make his position known. How could I possible dare to declare my own?"

Lin Qingyu disagreed, "This matter is easy to handle. You can go and discuss this with Prime Minister Cui. Together, you can come forth and write a memorial to the emperor."

Gu Fuzhou said, "The Madam is right."

The Nan'an Hou showed signs of reluctance. "This… what does the General wish me to write?"

Gu Fuzhou, seemingly accidental, brushed his hand against the handle of his sword. "Master Hou is a smart man. There should be no need for me to speak so bluntly."

Nan'an Hou wiped the sweat off his brow. Gathering up his courage, he said, "Although Concubine Chen has committed a big mistake, she has not implicate the Crown Prince. His Majest shows no intention of giving up on the Crown prince. If I, simply because the Crown Prince is ill and King Ning is currently supervising the country, ask his Majesty to revoke the Crown Prince's

position, would I not be accused of sailing with the wind and currying favor with those in power?"

Lin Qingyu said: "Master Hou must be joking. How could this possibly be considered as sailing with the wind and curring favor with those in power? The General simply wishes for you to — go where the tides dictate."

Gu Fuzhou nodded. "The Madam is absolutely right."

The Nan'an Hou was stunned. "Go where the tides dictate? But…"

"That day, when Master Hou asked on behalf of the Fourth Prince that he be grated his title, you have already boarded His Highness' ship. At that time, the Fourth Prince had no political merits, he had none of the Emperor's favor. Despite this, Master Hou extended his help and His Highness has always kept this kindness in mind. Now, His Highness has his achievements, the heart of the people. Is Master Hou certain that he wishes to disembark at this time, to withold his help instead of being this ship's helmsman?"

The Nan'an Hou seemed moved. Hints of being swayed appeared in his eyes.

Lin Qingyu went on, "So long as Master Hou is able to win over people's hearts on behalf of His Highness, convincing many of the civil ministers and

censors to His Highness' side, not to mention being minister of revenue, he may even reward you with the prime minister's postion."

Just as Nan'an Hou was hesitating to agree, Gu Fuzhou's words allowed him to make his decision, "Do it for the glory of the Lu Clan, for your infant child not yet a year old."

The Marquis of Nan'an took a deep breath, "His Highness can leave the civil ministers to me."

Not long after, a memorial composed by the Nan'an Hou and signed jointly by several officials was sent to the emperor's palace. Lin Qingyu handed the memorial to the empress. "Niangniang, please see if everything is in order."

The Empress looked at it and said, "Everything appears appropriate."

"Then, let us have His Majesty rise."

After many days, Lin Qingyu once again administered acupuncture to the unconscious emperor. When the Emperor finally managed to awaken, he looked with cloudy eyes to his bedside. "Empress…"

"Your Majesty." The Empress said softly, "You are awake."

The emperor's fingers moved. His voice was hoarse, rough as gravel, "The

Imperial Physician?"

Lin Qingyu said, "This minister is here."

An unknown incense was lit, it's rich fragrance suffused throughout the room. The Emperor looked at Lin Qingyu, his expression gradually becoming dull.

"This minister asked the Emperor back because there is something I would like His Majesty to do." Lin Qingyu's voice was very soft, as if talking to a child, "Can the Emperor do it for me?"

The Emperor nodded numbly.

Lin Qingyu gave a slight smile. "Really obedient." He raised his eyes in signal and Lai Fu, waiting by the side, immediately carried a table and placed it onto the bed. The Empress helped the Emperor to sit up and handed him the imperial brush.

Once everything was ready, Lai Fu presented the jade seal. The Empress held the Emperor's hand and stamped it on the edict. After doing so, the Emperor fell into slumber once again. The Empress indifferently covered him with the quilt. She said, her concern for herself, "Your Majesty, do not blame Chenqie. If you wish for someone to blame, blame yourself. If you had but spared the barest thought for Li'er, Chenqie wouldn't have resorted to this. Your Majesty has so many princes and princesses, but Chenqie only has Li'er. I am but a mother who wishes to be reunited with her son. Why are you so unwilling? No

matter how much of a dullard Li'er is, he is also your own flesh and blood. Why……"

As the Empress spoke, she began to choke up.

Lin Qingyu put away the edict and said, "Niangniang, His Highness the Sixth Prince is still waiting for you in Jinyang Garden."

The Empress expressionlessly wiped away her tears. She said, "The Emperor once said that Jinyang Garden is warm in winter and cool in summer. With its pleasant climate, it's a good place to recuperate. That was why he sent Li'er to stay there. It seems to me that once the Third Prince, Xiao Cheng moves out of

the Eastern Palace, it would be the perfect place for him to recuperate…He won't be coming back."

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. "Yes."

The author has something to say: 'A person from ancient time transmigrates to the present' Mini-theater

Classmate Jiang and the Great Beauty made an appointment to meet at the mall. There were a lot of people in the mall, so even if it turns out to be some sort of scam, he wasn't afraid.

Classmate Jiang took the subway to the mall (sorry, seventeen-year-old high school students can't drive) and waited for a long time but saw no sign of the Great Beauty.

He sent a message to the stranger: Where is he?

Stranger: Your wife can't get in.

Classmate Jiang: ?

Stranger: He has no health code. = =

Chapter 84

During the start of summer, the Crown Prince Xiao Cheng was repeatedly censured by the censors, charged with 'bringing dishonor to his ancestors' achievements, of acting without proper authority and of collecting cronies'. Immediately after, an order came from the Emperor: Addressed to temple of our ancestors and to the all the people of the country, King Ning, fourth son of the emperor, modest and self-effacing, of virtuous character, taking after His Majesty himself, is granted the scroll, treasure and position of crown prince.

On the day of the proclamation of the new crown prince, Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou went to the palace to attend the ceremony. The two stood for hours under the scorching sun. Lin Qingyu managed fine and at the end of the ceremony, was still as magnificent as snow. Gu Fuzhou, on the other hand, was half-dead from baking under the sun; his court attire already soaked through with sweat. This "frail" foreigner couldn't stand the high temperature that had persistent the past few days. As soon as they returned to the mansion, quick as a bold of lightning, he took off his heavy court clothes and slumped on the

cool bench in only his sleeping garments. For a good long while, he couldn't even muster up a single word.

Huan Tong brought in a bucket of ice and Hua Lu served up red grapes that had been soaking in the well. Slowly, Gu Fuzhou managed to recover.

While Gu Fuzhou was dazed by the heat, Lin Qingyu had already changed his clothes. He was dressed in unadorned white, sitting at the table with jade fan in hand, explaining today's dinner to Huan Tong. With the light of the summer sunset draping over his figure, he created a serene scene worthy of painting.

Seeing this, an unquenchable fire rose in Gu Fuzhou's heeart. He really wanted to go over there and tease him. But after standing for six straight hours, even

moving his fingers proved difficult. He felt like he would die if he leaves this bend.

“Have the kitchen cook a pot of barley porridge. Prepare some pickles to stir the appetite and then prepare a couple of stir-fried vegetable dishes.”

Huan Tong wrote down the instructions. He said, “Young Master, do you really not want any meat or fish? The General might be unhappy with the lack of meat.”

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, “Then add some braised pork leg. Once the meal is ready, send it directly to our room.”

“Alright. I’ll have the kitchen prepare these.”

The General’s Mansion housed no elders and with Gu Fuzhou, this man of ‘elegance and refinement’, by his side, Lin Qingyu found himself starting to slacken in matters of etiquette. When he had nothing to do, he would accompany Gu Fuzhou for a lie-in in bed. Gu Fuzhou was often too lazy to go to the front hall to eat, so he would have the food delivered to their room. During rare times of leisure, when he wasn’t reading books, dispensing

medicines, or raising Gu, he would spend time wiling away the hours with Gu Fuzhou.

If thing went on like this, Gu Fuzhou was definitely going to corrupt him into becoming a bag of lazybones as well.

Lin Qingyu turned around. He caught sight of Gu Fuzhou lying motionless on the cool bench. He frowned a little: “How long do you plan on lying there? Aren’t you going to changed your clothes?”

Gu Fuzhou stretched out his hand and pointed at the table. He said with a lazy tone: “Qingyu, I want to eat grapes.”

The red grapes were placed not far from Gu Fuzhou’s hand. He needed only to straighten up to reach them. With a ‘you are hopeless’ expression, Lin Qingyu approached and plucked a red grape. “Don’t eat too much. We’ll be having the evening meal soon.”

Gu Fuzhou blinked. “Feed it to my mouth…”

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes. He quickly and accurately shoved the red grape into Gu Fuzhou’s mouth. “You’re going to die from laziness.”

The red grape was sweet and juicy and it because it’d been soaked in the well, it also had a heat relieving effect. Gu Fuzhou was satisfied with his meal. Just as

Lin Qingyu was about to withdraw his hand, Gu Fuzhou grabbed it and pulled him into his arms.

Lin Qingyu was forced to sit on General Slacker's lap. His eyes narrowed like knives, but he didn't struggle. "So, now you have energy again?"

"While I don't have energy for anything else, I still have the energy to hold my wife." Gu Fuzhou twisted of fed it to Lin Qingyu. He waited until after Lin Qingyu ate it before saying, "Xiao Jie has already attained the title of crown prince. For the time being, Xi Rong is behaving himself and is content with his lot. Can you take a break now?"

Lin Qingyu said, "The sea of learning has no horizon. For those who have the heart, there is never a moment to be idle."

"The sea of learning may have no bounds but your husband's age does." Gu Fuzhou was being naughty as he held Lin Qingyu in his arms. His hand touched that graceful waist, that slender abdomen, lingering. "I am in my thirties. If we wait until you're done before you accompany me, even if I want to do something to you, my spirit might be willing but my flesh would be

weak. By then, would you take me square dancing or should we simply gossip under the sheets?"

Gu Fuzhou's caresses made Lin Qingyu feel a little like smiling. "What is square dance?"

Hua Lu came in with the food. Seeing the Young Master sitting on the General's lap, listening carefully to the General's description of a beautiful dance with a very exotic style, she felt an upsurge of emotion in her heart. Though she has been serving the Young Master for so long, she never knew he had this side to him — gentle like water.

Whenever the Young Master and the General were together, they were happy. This was a kind of happiness that Young Master Hou couldn't give to him. When the Young Master and Young Master Hou first became husband and wife, the Young Master didn't have any good feelings for Young Master Hou. Later on, he gradually softened and grew willing to accept Young Master Hou. And yet, there still remained that layer of forbearance and gloom in his eyes. He knew that Young Master Hou only had a year left to live. So even when he was happy, there was always that shadow behind it.

And now that he was by General Gu's side, though that deep shadow persisted, there would certainly come a day when he would completely recover.

Suddenly, Hua Lu felt relieved. Gone was the feeling of unwillingness she felt for Young Master Hou. She no longer blamed the General for snatching away

the young master. Because… the Young Master's smile, so genuine and unguarded, was truly beautiful.

Hua Lu withdrew with the food, almost bumping into Huan Tong who was carrying a pot of calamus wine. Huan Tong asked, "Why did you come out again?"

Hua Lu blushed. "The Young Master and the General are too busy to eat right now. Let's bring these in a little later. It's so hot; better let the porridge cool first."

In the room, Gu Fuzhou was still talking without cease, on and on. Inadvertently locking eyes with Lin Qingyu, he suddenly felt like an idiot talking about square dancing with Lin Qingyu. He immediately cut his losses and changed the topic. "—in short, since matters have come to temporary close, it's also time for you to fulfill your promise. Tomorrow, you are not allowed to go the palace. Nor are you allowed to go to the Imperial Physician's Office. You are to stay here in the Mansion and keep me company."

Lin Qingyu was about to say something, when he heard Gu Fuzhou say, "You gave me a written pledge."

Lin Qingyu curled his lips. "I remember. There are twenty-four hours in a day and I won't deprive you even an hour less."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and leaned forward to kiss him. Lin Qingyu pushed Gu Fuzhou away and said, "You're sweating all over. Aren't you going to take a

bath yet?"

Hearing the word "bath", Gu Fuzhou already felt tired. "Save me. Washing my hair is such a bother."

Lin Qingyu said, "On hot days like today, it's easy for long hair to dry."

"It's still too much trouble. Qingyu, I want to cut my hair short, can I?"

"Short hair?" Lin Qingyu asked curiously, "How short?"

Gu Fuzhou gestured with his thumb and index finger, the two fingers were almost touching. "This short."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "Why don't you just become a monk?"

The next day, Lin Qingyu actually didn't go anywhere. He even specially instructed Yuan Yin to close theirs gates and turn awat guests for today. Gu Fuzhou slept in until it was three poles high in the sky. After getting up, he shared a noontime meal with Lin Qingyu. In the afternoon, during the hottest time of the day, the two stayed in their room stocked with ice. On a whim, Gu Fuzhou chatted with Lin Qingyu about music.

Lin Qingyu's specialty lay in medicine; nevertheless, he had studied the four arts. Gu Fuzhou wanted to see him play music, so he asked Huan Tong to fetch a Guqin from the warehouse. Huan Tong didn't know which one Lin Qingyu

was pertaining to, so he simply brought the whole cache over. The box contained all the musical instruments that Lin Qingyu had used.

Gu Fuzhou picked up a Xiqin and said, “Is this an Erhu?”

“Erhu?” Lin Qingyu said, “In the Dayu, this is called a Xiqin.”

“I know how to play this one.” Gu Fuzhou said with great interest, “When I was young, my mother forced me to choose two kinds of musical instruments to

learn — a foreign instrument and a classical one. For the latter, I chose the Xiqin."

Lin Qingyu said, "Why does it feel like all the things you know to do, your mother forced you to learn?"

Gu Fuzhou said with a chuckle, "Yeah, it's fortunate I had her. Otherwise, finding myself here in the Dayu, I wouldn't even have been able to write with a brush. What could I have used to make you fall for me?"

Seeing the homesick look in Gu Fuzhou's eyes, Lin Qingyu had no idea how to comfort him. Gu Fuzhou's hometown was so far away, it was practically impossible for him to go back.

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes. He plucked the strings lightly and asked, "What song do you want to listen to?"

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Qingyu, I'll use this Xiqin to play a duet with you, how about it?"

Lin Qingyu smiled. "Alright."

The pair had absolutely no tacit understanding, creating a piece that was jarring and harsh to the ears. Huan Tong and Hua Lu were tortured for a long

time; each pulling away farther than the other.

When the sun begun to set, Gu Fuzhou took Lin Qingyu to the pond to fish.

He has been in the Dayu for some time and fishing has become Gu Fuzhou's favorite pastime. It required little effort and it provided the joy of a harvest. It was a lot more enjoyable than playing basketball or tennis.

While Gu Fuzhou fished, Lin Qingyu stayed by the side, giving him a bite of freshly cut fruit from time to time. Several maidservants were coming from a distance. Seeing the two, they approached and saluted, "General, Madam."

Gu Fuzhou saw that each of them had a straw basket full of bamboo leaves. He asked, "Are you going to make zongzi?"

A servant girl smiled and said, "What else? It's going to be the Dragon Boat Festival soon. We were thinking to wash the leaves and glutinous rice in preparation. We didn't mean to disturb the General and his wife."

"You're not disturbing us." Lin Qingyu said, "Zongzi…how do you wrap it?"

Gu Fuzhou was greatly surprised. The maid hurriedly took out a bamboo leaf and put a handful of glutinous rice on it. "First, fold it like this. Then this…

Finally, turn it over and tie it with a rope."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "I'll give it a try."

He had no interest in fishing and simply accompanying Gu Fuzhou was boring. And so, he found something for himself to do. Who wants to make

zongzi? It looked simple, but was difficult to do. Though he tried several ties, he simply unable to do it. After some time, he completely lost patience.

Gu Fuzhou took a look and said, “High-end ingredients often only require simple cooking methods. Doctor Lin, who kept at it for an entire hour, decided to leave everything to the servants.”

The air was filled with the leisurely smiles of summer evenings.

Lin Qingyu dried his hands and said without a change in his expression, “Shut your mouth.”

At this moment, Yuan Yin turned up, looking for the both them: “General, Madam, someone came to the mansion to deliver a message…”

Lin Qingyu said, “I said no guests today.”

“But that person brought a token with him.” Yuan Yin took out a golden stone. It was the same one Lin Qingyu had given to Shen Huaishi that day.

Lin Qingyu said, “Where’s the letter? Bring it to me.”

Shen Huaishi’s words were as succinct as ever: See you at Jinxiu Pavilion.

Lin Qingyu said, “Shen Huaishi is still in the capital.”

Gu Fuzhou read the letter over Lin Qingyu’s shoulder. Reminding him, he

said, “You promised one whole day, twenty-four hours. An hour less means it’s not one whole day.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Then, I won’t go.”

Gu Fuzhou looked at him with a slightly hesitant look. He laughed out loud. “No, no, no. It can’t be that Doctor Lin didn’t see that I was just joking.”

Lin Qingyu was slightly startled. “A joke?” He really hadn’t thought he was joking.

Gu Fuzhou said: “Shen Huaishi came to see you at this time, it must be something serious and may be urgent. How could I not let you go?”

Despite Gu Fuzhou saying this, but Lin Qingyu had made a firm choice. “No, I promised to accompany you for the whole day. A man of virtue is as good as his word.”

“Come on, when did you become a man of virtue?” Gu Fuzhou laughed, You’re obviously a vengeful ‘petty man’ with lies on hand and words running contrary to one’s heart.”

Lin Qingyu’s tone was contemptuous. “So that is how the General sees me.” He

has lied to many people, but he has never lied to Gu Fuzhou.

“Isn’t it such a coincidence? That my exact type are deceitful great beauties.”

Lin Qingyu had never been one to go along with this ruse of Gu Fuzhou’s. “The General’s type isn’t ‘deceitful great beauties’. The general just likes great beauties.” In other words, what Gu Fuzhou liked the most was his face.

“You can’t say that. After all, the only reason why I like deceitful great beauties is because you’re deceitful.” Gu Fuzhou put his hands on Lin Qingyu’s shoulders and pushed him outside, “Alright, now, hurry up. Go, the protagonist of the original book is still waiting for you. Come back as soon as you’re done.”

“You…” Lin Qingyu reluctantly compromised, “I can go by myself.”

Gu Fuzhou watched Lin Qingyu leave. Once he was gone, Gu Fuzhou chuckled to himself. He stretched and went back to his room to catch up on sleep.

The author has something to say: Mini-theater:

The reason why the stranger was so enthusiastic in this meet up was, aside from being turned down by the great beauty, she just wanted to see what kind

of man could be the husband of a great beauty. She was unconvinced, unwilling. Why is it that such a great beauty already had a husband?

After some spot of trouble, the stranger finally managed to bring the great beauty to meet Jiang.

Stranger: …Okay, alright, I give. You two talk. I'll be going first.

PS: The romance plots of the supporting roles were made completely for the two protagonists. I won't be derailing from the main plot to write about them. The extras will have only Lu Wancheng, Gu Fuzhou, Xiao Li, Classmate Jiang X Qingyu.

Chapter 85

Lin Qingyu changed his clothes and took a carriage to Jinxiu Pavilion.

As the finest dining establishment in the capital, Jinxiu Pavilion was always full of people and very lively save for special periods such as times of national mourning. Even though Lin Qingyu thought that Shen Huaishi would be in the capital, he had not expected that he would invite him to meet at Jinxiu Pavilion. Although he had already ordered the Tianji Camp to stop their pursuit of Shen Huaishi, Shen Huaishi himself should not know about it yet and yet he dared to appear within the capital. Was this due to his confidence in his own skills?

The edict stripping Xiao Cheng of his position as crown prince has already been publicized. It was very likely that Shen Huaishi was looking for himf at this time because of Xiao Cheng. Needless to say, he was looking forward to it.

Lin Qingyu asked the pavilion's manager for a private room on the second floor and a pot of tea. He sat by the window, drinking tea and watching people come and go. Yongxing Street was as bustling as ever, with the clamoring of shopkeepers and hawkers and pedestrians hurriedly passing by. The emperor was seriously ill, the position of heir has changed hands; all these seemed to

have no effect on these ordinary people. If things were like this in capital, what more in other places?

No matter who the crown prince was, who it was sitting on the dragon chair, or who was holding the royal brush to rule the lands under heaven, the life of the common people will go on.

After some time, the door shut softly. Lin Qingyu said “come in” and a man wearing a veiled hat walked in. The black gauze hung down, blocking the man’s features. Lin Qingyu asked Huan Tong to go outside and stand watch.

The man took off his hat, revealing an ordinary face, forgettable in the blink of an eye.

Lin Qingyu said, “I didn’t expect to see you again so soon.”

Shen Huaishi showed a faint smile. “Doctor Lin.”

Shen Huaishi could still smile. It seemed he didn’t come to him criticize him. Lin Qingyu pushed back his sleeve and pointed to seat across the tea table. “Sit.”

Shen Huaishi sat down in front of Lin Qingyu, a hint of unease on his face but calm overall. Lin Qingyu asked him, “Why did you ask me to meet here? Didn’t we always meet Changsheng Temple?”

“I’m leaving the capital. I don’t know when I’ll see you again.” Shen Huaishi lowered his eyes and said, “Before I leave, I want to have a drink with you.”

Lin Qingyu looked at the man’s honest appearance and felt a twinge of discomfort in his chest. He and Shen Huaishi have known each other for a long time. Every time they met, it was either at the Imperial Medical Office or at Changsheng Temple. Never have to two of them sat together like this, across each other, over a pot of good tea.

In the past, he had used Shen Huaishi as a chess piece and there was no need for the chess player and the chess piece to drink together. Now that Xiao Cheng had fallen, Shen Huaishi was no longer even qualified to be a chess

piece in his hand. Why had he chosen to come here instead of keeping his husband company?

Lin Qingyu asked, “Why do you want to drink with me?”

Shen Huaishi looked up and said, “Because, I regard Doctor Lin as a friend.”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t help but smile. His smile momentarily stunned Shen Huaishi and he couldn’t help but say, “Also, your eyes really look like Jingchun’s.”

Lin Qingyu said jokingly, “So, you too take me as a substitute for Princess Jingchun?”

Shen Huaishi sternly denied, “I don’t. You’re good-looking, even… better looking than Jingchun. And your personalities are completely different. I would never confuse the two of you. But you healed my wounds and you

found Brother Zhu for me and allowed me to discover the truth of that time. I am very grateful to you."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Let me ask you. Did you stay in the capital because you didn't believe me? Did you think I would harm Jingchun?"

"I believed you." Shen Huaishi defended with difficulty, "I just…"

"If you care so much about Jingchun, why don't you go to the north to see him?"

Shen Huaishi shook his head. "He should be doing well in the North, I don't want to trouble him."

Lin Qingyu looked at him for a while and asked, "What kind of wine would you like to drink?"

There was a hint of joy on Shen Huaizhi's face. His lifeless face finally had a bit of spirit. "Whatever you'd like."

Shen Huaishi mentioned nothing about Xiao Cheng; as though he really just wanted to drink with Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu ordered a pot of Jinxiu Pavilion's signature bamboo leaf wine and ordered a few dishes that he thought were good. Shen Huaishi wasn't good with words and spoke little unless it was necessary. Lin Qingyu too wasn't someone who talked a lot and most of his words, he spoke to Gu Fuzhou. The two spent the meal in silence. In the end, Shen Huaishi picked up the wine and said, "Let's say bid each other

goodbye today. Hence forth, we shall be worlds apart and meeting will be difficult. Doctor Lin, take care."

Lin Qingyu also raised his cup in a toast. He took a sip and said, "Where are you going back to the fishing village in the Southern Border?"

Shen Huaishi laughed at himself. "I haven't thought about it yet. The world is so big. Someday, there will be a place for me."

"It's a pity that you'd be wasting your martial arts skills. You probably won't be able to rejoin the Tianji Camp." Lin Qingyu said after a pause, "Perhaps, you'd be willing to stay with me and the general?"

Lin Qingyu's invitation was far beyond Shen Huaishi's expectations. "You mean… General Gu?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "The General is now in charge of the imperial guards and the capital's cavalry battalion. It would not be difficult to find a position for you – Haven't you always admired the General?"

After getting over the shock, Shen Huaishi smiled, "Thank you, Doctor Lin, for your kindness. I do admire the General, but unfortunately, I do not wish to

remain in the capital."

Lin Qingyu pondered: "So, you still want to escape."

"No, I just want to have a peaceful life."

Lin Qingyu smiled coldly. "If you truly had let go of everything, you wouldn't be here now."

Shen Huaizhi pursed his lips and fell into silence.

After a while, Lin Qingyu said, "Huaishi, the 'truth' that Zhu Yongxin told you that day was not entirely true."

Shen Huaishi's pupils suddenly shrank. "What?"

"It is true that Xiao Cheng bears responsibility for the destruction of the Heavenly Prison Sect. But at the last moment, he pulled back. It was the Emperor who had a backup plan. Under the guise of the Red Fang Sect, he ordered the Tianji Camp to slaughter every last member of the Heavenly Prison Sect. Xiao Cheng expended a lot of effort to save your life." Lin Qingyu said, "But Xiao Cheng's scheming against the Heavenly Prison Sect and his

deception of you all these years, makes him, In my opinion, no different from the culprit, the Emperor. However, you might think otherwise."

Shen Huaishi's face paled. "Why are you suddenly telling me the truth?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Don't you think of me as a friend? I don't usually lie to my friends."

Of course, he was willing to tell Shen Huaishi the actual truth. The most important point was that Xiao Cheng had already suffered a crushing defeat;

no knows how long he had left to live. There was no possibility he would ever return to power. Under the circumstances, the “truth” was not so important.

Shen Huaishi was silent, only that his breathing became heavier.

Lin Qingyu scrutinized his expression and said, “Why? Do you now regret slashing him?”

When Shen Huaishi spoke again, his voice was hoarse. “Why did you lie to me?”

Lin Qingyu said bluntly, “I was afraid you would grow soft-hearted.”

A strange laugh came out of Shen Huaishi’s throat. “In your eyes, I’m just… so cheap?”

Lin Qingyu asked back, “Aren’t you?”

Shen Huaishi choked on his breath. He suddenly stood up and clenched his hands into fists. “I-I’m leaving.”

Lin Qingyu said behind him, “I lied to you, I’m sorry, but I don’t regret it. Even given the circumstances at that time, you still chose to spare Xiao Cheng’s life. If you’d known that Xiao Cheng grew soft-hearted in the end, I was afraid that

not only would you not strike him but you might even forgive him generously and continue on warming his bed and throwing your life away for him…"

The undisguised contempt in Lin Qingyu's tone was like a knife stabbing at Shen Huaishi's heart. His eyes were red-rimmed and he blurted out, "I wouldn't!"

Lin Qingyu put down his drink. "Then show me."

Shen Huaishi said, almost like a growl, "What do you want me to do?"

"Xiao Cheng is recuperating in Jinyang Garden. I can let you see him again."

Shen Huaishi said hoarsely, "See him…?"

"After you see him again, whether you wish to take his life to avenge the Heavenly Prison Sect, or save him so that you can continue your relationship in the future or let him live as he is, half-dead and watching helplessly as you build a life of love and happiness with someone else, murmuring endearments yet powerless, him your captive for the rest of his life — simply tell me and I shall grant it to you." Lin Qingyu raised the corner of his lips and there was

irresistible bewitchment in his cold voice, ” But I will not force you, the right to choose is in your own hands.”

Shen Huaishi was stunned for a long time and sat down slowly. On the other hand, Lin Qingyu stood up. “When you’ve thought about it, come find me again.”

Now past the Dragon Boat Festival, the days were getting hotter. The capital has not had a drop of rain for two months. The fields were cracked and the streams had dried up. Seeing the severe drought in the capital, the new crown prince, Xiao Jie, went to Tiantai Mountain together with the National Teacher to ask for rain. He has yet to returned.

The sun’s rays were scorching and cicadas cried out loudly. Lin Qingyu has been in the Imperial Medical Office’s library for most of the the day. he was half through “The Dayu’s Medical Compendium”. Suddenly, someone touched his right shoulder, he looked automatically to his right. There was no one there. When he looked back, he saw a thirty-year-old man sitting to his left.

Lin Qingyu wondered, “Why are you here?”

The hotter the weather, the more salted was Gu Fuzhou. Throughout the midsummer, he barely seen Gu Fuzhou go out. It must be some big matter to

force Gu Fuzhou to brave the scorching sun to go to the Imperial Medical Office to come looking for him.

There was a thin layer of sweat on Gu Fuzhou's forehead. One hand behind his back, he closed Lin Qingyu's book with the other. He pushed it aside, and said with a smile, "I have something for you."

"What?"

Gu Fuzhou took out his hand from behind his back. He was holding a porcelain jar. He said with an old spirit: "Ever since our darling little Gu died beneath Huan Tong's foot, you have been depressed, your face awash with tears. As your husband, I simply can't stand it, so……"

Lin Qingyu's heartbeat began to race. "You didn't…"

"That's right. I present to you a nest of little Gu insects." Gu Fuzhou opened the lid, "I sent people to request these from the Southern Border's Gu King. They should meet your requirements."

Lin Qingyu took a closer look at the Gu insects that Gu Fuzhou gave him. A quick look showed that they were indeed the kind he wanted. As for whether they would produce the desired effect, that may only be known after raising

them. But this has already saved him more than half the time and effort already.

Lin Qingyu smiled. “This is the best gift I have ever received.”

Gu Fuzhou’s mood turned subtle. “En…do you like it more than the engagement ring I gave you?”

To be honest, a nest of little Gu insects was much more useful to him than a ring. Because he often had to concoct medicines, it was inconvenient to wear things on his hands. The ring that Gu Fuzhou gave him, he had stored away together with other important objects. But at this moment, Lin Qingyu felt that he could tell a harmless little lie. He wiped the sweat from Gu Fuzhou’s forehead with his sleeve. “I still prefer the ring.”

Gu Fuzhou relaxed and he sat, half leaning against the table; even so, he was still much taller than Lin Qingyu who was standing upright. Gu Fuzhou

grabbed him casually and Lin Qingyu was taken a step forward, bracketed between a pair of long legs.

Gu Fuzhou looked at Lin Qingyu's expression and said, "You lied, Doctor Lin. You clearly prefer the little Gu insects. Sigh, you almost had me fooled again."

There was a smile in Lin Qingyu's eyes. "Both these things, you gave to me. So what's the difference?"

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows. "Then what about my return gift?"

Lin Qingyu lightly touched his cheek. "I'll give it to you when we return to the Mansion."

Gu Fuzhou seemed to be dissatisfied. He held onyo Lin Qingyu, not letting him go. "…Hm? That's like saying you'll give it to me in a year."

Lin Qingyu warned, "This is the library. There may be students from the Imperial Medical Office later."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and let go of him. "So that's it."

Before leaving, Lin Qingyu had to return the medical books on the table. Gu Fuzhou followed behind him, carrying the books. Gu Fuzhou handed the

books and Lin Qingyu put them away. Before the last book, Gu Fuzhou suddenly called out to him. “Qingyu.”

As soon as Lin Qingyu turned around, he was gently pushed; his back directly against the bookshelf. Before he could react, Gu Fuzhou bent down and kissed his lips.

In an instant, Lin Qingyu was so panicked that he froze in place. This wasn’t the General’s Mansion; they weren’t in their bedroom. They were in the library and there are two guards posted at the door. Even they won’t be spotted, this was where he usually studied medicine. How could Gu Fuzhou… how could he kiss him here!

It wasn’t until his lips were bitten that Lin Qingyu barely managed to come back to his senses. He heard Gu Fuzhou say, “Qingyu, open your mouth.”

Lin Qingyu held the last medical book in his arms. His cheeks red, he called out subconsciously, “Jiang…”

His lips parted and Young Master Jiang’s tongue came just as expected and coaxing this little inexplicable sound from him.

They had no idea when the weather turn a took outside. A flash of lightning streaked through the air. Then thunder, then wind; a rainstorm came suddenly

pouring down. The rain pounded the window casement and the library was as dark as night.

Lin Qingyu leaned back against the bookshelf. He closed his eyes, long lashes trembling slightly, he allowed Gu Fuzhou to kiss him.

Gentle, warm and ardent.

This was the first and last rain of this summer.

In August, the former crown prince Xiao Cheng died in Jinyang Garden. In October, the Emperor died of illness and the crown prince, Xiao Jie ascended to the throne with a reigning title of Chuxi; Empress Feng Wen, the only empress dowager of Dayu, held court behind a curtain.

The author has something to say: Mini Theater: The Daily Life of Classmate Jiang and the Great Beauty

After a period of time, classmate Jiang procured an ID card and household registration for the Great Beauty. Finally, the Great Beauty was no longer some unregistered resident.

Then Jiang, who was still under the age of 18, bound a game account with his wife's ID card——

Classmate Jiang: Qingyu, Qingyu, help me do an anti-addiction face recognition. I love you!

88

Chapter 86

The day Xiao Jie ascended the throne was an auspicious day. It was also an exceedingly normal autumn day. Lin Qingyu, though he has an official position but because it was only as fifth-rank imperial physician, add to that his status as a male wife, rendered him unqualified to participate in the enthronement ceremony. However, he was still able to stand in the midst of a group of civil servants. To either side of him were the Assistant Minister of Revenue and the Jian Yi Senior Official. Not only that, but he was the youngest among these fifth-rank officials; only twenty years old this year.

Some people said that he was able to stand here because of General Gu's honor; others believed that Lin Qingyu himself was favored by the new emperor and the empress dowager. Lin Qingyu was allowed to walk freely in the palace, frequently visiting the Qinzheng Palace and Fengyi Palace. It could be seen that this person wasn't just a simply Imperial Physician. There were rumors in the palace that the new emperor had offered Lin Qingyu his pick of any position he wanted, even jesting that the position of prime minister was open to him. But Lin Qingyu had declined. Lin Qingyu said that he wanted merely to be an imperial physician.

At the announcement that "the emperor has arrived", all the ministers knelt down and kowtowed. Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou were no exception. The ground was quite hard and Lin Qingyu felt uncomfortable on his knees. The red carpet was spread all the way from the gate of the palace to Zichen Hall.

The new emperor walked down the carpet, passing the civil and military officials one by one; finally, setting foot on the long steps to Zichen Hall.

In the Dayu, black was a color to be respected. The dragon robe was mostly black and gold. Pure black inlaid with gold threads, embroidered with a nine-clawed dragon. The hem of the dragon robe was extremely wide, dragging over the long steps, covering the emperor's feet. Every time the emperor took a step, the ceremonial crown on his head would make a sound, the golden beads colliding.

Following the new emperor was a reserved, androgynous-looking eunuch. This man was dressed connoting his status as the one in charge of the Si Lijian stared fixedly at the emperor's back. He followed him up the long steps, setting foot into the Zichen Hall and finally making their way towards the throne.

Xiao Jie sat down on the dragon throne. He opened his mouth, said something and the minister of rites said, "All rise—"

Lin Qingyu stood up and looked at the dragon throne from a distance. Though Xiao Jie had donned on the luxurious dragon robe, he was still nothing more

than a pretty idiot; not worth mentioning. Lin Qingyu spared him only a glance before focusing on Xi Rong.

It was ridiculous. No matter how much Xi Rong hated his status as a castrate, for Xiao Jie, for power, he had no choice but to once again be a court eunuch. At least, this time he was head of the court eunuchs.

After the enthronement ceremony, Lin Qingyu was about to return to the Mansion with Gu Fuzhou, when he was found by Xiao Songzi, saying that the emperor had invited him to Qinzheng Palace. Lin Qingyu asked, "Say so clearly, was it the Emperor who invited me or Eunuch Xi?"

Xiao Songzi was now the eunuch in charge of serving tea in the Qinzheng Hall, any sign of trouble within Qinzheng Hall would appear right under his nose. "The invitation came from the Emperor," he said, "Eunuch Xi is busy with the Empress Dowager's move from Fengyi Palace to Ci'an Palace."

"Doesn't seem to be anything serious." Gu Fuzhou said, "Go ahead, I'll wait for you in the Imperial Garden."

Lin Qingyu came to the Qinzheng Hall. Xiao Jie was surrounded by several palace maids, helping him change. Xiao Jie grinned when he saw him. "Imperial Physician Lin, you're here. Take a seat first. I… Zhen will be finished here soon. Xiao Songzi, serve Imperial Physician Lin some tea."

After some time, Xiao Jie was back in his regular clothes. He complained, "This dragon robe is really too hard to wear and the ceremonial crown was so heavy,

I though it would break my neck."

Lin Qingyu said: "The dragon robe is heavy so as to reflect the demeanor of the Emperor."

Xiao Jie was quite self-aware, "But Zhen's aura isn't imposing enough. I can't even wear the dragon robe with enough style. If it were my brother, the Crown Prince… I mean Third Brother, Third Brother would be more suited to wearing something like this."

Saying something like this in front of an official, in Lin Qingyu's eyes, Xiao Jie was already the walking definition of "stupid". No matter how smart Xi Rong maybe, averaging out his intelligence with Xiao Jie, he would be nothing more than half a fool.

"—Or even Sixth Brother." Xiao Jie kept babbling on, "Imperial Physician Lin, have you seen Zhen's Sixth Brother?"

Lin Qingyu nodded, "I've seen him."

Xiao Jie said excitedly, "Isn't he good-looking?"

"En."

"Zhen has always thought Sixth Brother to be the handsomest young man in the entire world. If I were my Imperial Father, I would definitely not have left him in Jinyang Garden, separating him from his mother for so many years."

Regret appeared on Xiao Jie's face. "He would be a sight for sore eyes in the palace."

Lin Qingyu said, "The Empress Dowager has brought the Sixth Prince back to the palace. His Majesty will be able to see him often in the future." Now that Xiao Jie has ascended to the throne, Xiao Li was no longer merely the Sixth

Prince. After getting the Empress Dowager's approval, he granted Xiao Li the position of Feudal King with the title 'Huai'.

Hearing these words, Xiao Jie cheered up once again, "Sixth Brother and you as well, you two are the ones I like seeing the most – ah, and A'Rong too."

Lin Qingyu didn't have much interest in talking with an idiot. "For what matter has His Majesty sought out this official?"

"Oh, that's right." Xiao Jie turned his neck, "Wearing that ceremonial crown the entire day, my neck is now so sore. I heard that you are very proficient in acupuncture. Would you perform acupuncture on me?"

"Excuse me." Lin Qingyu touched Xiao Jie's neck, "Does it hurts here?"

Xiao Jie let out a "hiss" and frowned. "Right there!"

Lin Qingyu said, "For ordinary sprains, acupuncture is not necessary. A hot compress will be sufficient."

Thinking that Gu Fuzhou was still waiting for him, Lin Qingyu did not stay long in the Qinzheng Hall. As he was walking out of Qinzheng Palace, he happened to Xi Rong who was on his way back from Ci'an Palace. Xi Rong

maintained and refined and courteous manner. “Greetings, Imperial Physician Lin.”

Lin Qingyu gave a soft reply and headed in the direction of the Imperial Garden. Xi Rong directed a sharp look towards to his back. As soon as he entered the hall, he asked Xiao Jie, “Is something the matter that His Majesty sought out Imperial Physician Lin?”

Xiao Jie had his neck tilted, waiting for Xiao Songzi to apply a hot compress. “Oh, my neck feels sore. Zhen had him take a look at it.”

Xi Rong approached and took the towel from Xiao Songzi. “Leave things here to me. You may all withdraw first.”

When the palace maids and eunuchs retired one after another, Xi Rong put the hot compress on Xiao Jie’s neck for him. “Next time His Majesty feels ill, do

not go to Imperial Physician Lin. He is not the only one who has excellent medical skills in the Imperial Hospital."

Xiao Jie was puzzled. "Why?"

Xi Rong said calmly, "Imperial Physician Lin and General Gu are not loyal to the Emperor."

Xiao Jie stared at him and said incredulously, "That can't be!"

"Oh?" Xi Rong's lips ticked up. "This husband and wife pair was able to support you to the throne, naturally, they also have a way to turn you into the second Xiao Cheng. Otherwise, why would Lin Qingyu want the Empress Dowager holding court behind a curtain? Why would they have Gu Fuzhou in charge of the imperial guards?"

Xiao Jie listened ignorantly, "They've helped us so much. It's only right that we give them something in return."

Xi Rong was well-aware of Xiao Jie's character and he knew talking to him was useless. And so, he said, "In any case, His Majesty should heed my words and stay away from Lin Qingyu."

Xiao Jie felt quite reluctant. "But…"

The strength of Xi Rong's hand suddenly increased, almost strangling Xiao Jie's neck. He leaned against Xiao Jie's ear and said gravely, "Your Majesty, how

long have you and Lin Qingyu known each other? And how long have we known each other? Do you want to believe him over me?"

Though someone was already grabbing his neck, Xiao Jie was still completely unaware of the approaching danger. He only knew that Xi Rong seemed angry, so he hurriedly said, "Alright, I promise. I'll stay away from him in the future. Don't be angry."

Gu Fuzhou was hanging out in the Imperial Garden, waiting for Lin Qingyu. Empress Dowager Wen was fond of chrysanthemums and the new emperor planted all kinds of chrysanthemums in the imperial garden to show his filial piety. This was the season for when chrysanthemums were in full bloom. There was a certain kind of charm strolling through all the flowers.

Gu Fuzhou took a short walk and found a stone bench to sit down on to rest. Just as he was getting bored, he inadvertently caught sight of a young man dressed in luxurious clothes squatting behind the rockery. Although he hadn't

seen the boy's face, he had already guessed his identity. The only one who could wear such fancy clothes in the palace was Xiao Li.

Gu Fuzhou asked the eunuch accompanying him, "Is this King Huai?"

"Yes."

"What on earth is he doing?" Gu Fuzhou looked amused, "Playing in the mud?"

The eunuch said, embarrassed, "This servant does not know."

Gu Fuzhou looked at Xiao Li's back. His brows furrowed slightly. He was about to step forward to take a look and get to the bottom of it, when he heard Lin Qingyu's voice coming from behind him. "General."

With his beautiful wife there, Gu Fuzhou lost all interest in looking at anyone else. "Hey, you finally got here."

Seeing his long-suffering expression, Lin Qingyu said, "I thought you like waiting for me?"

"That's right." Gu Fuzhou smiled, "But I prefer being with you."

The two returned to the Mansion. Huan Tong was busying about in the yard. When Lin Qingyu asked, he learned that Huan Tong was getting ready to

distribute charcoal to each room.

“Is it already time to use charcoal fire?” Lin Qingyu said softly, “Life flies by so fast.”

In the blink of an eye, winter was just around the corner.

Huan Tong said, “It’s not that cold yet but I was afraid the Young Master would be cold, so I thought of preparing the charcoal braziers already.”

A cold wave came charging in that night. It was indeed much colder than during the day. Before going to bed, Lin Qingyu added a few pieces of charcoal to the brazier and just as he was about to light it, he was stopped by Gu Fuzhou. “You’re already going to use charcoal fire when it isn’t even winter? Then what will you do in winter? Go out with a quilt? Has Doctor Lin not

heard of the saying ‘Keep warm in spring, stay cool in autumn; don’t rush to take off winter clothes in spring or put them on in autumn’ ?

Lin Qingyu looked at him. “But I’m cold.”

“It won’t be cold if we sleep together.” Gu Fuzhou said naturally, “Tomorrow, I’ll have someone change the bunk bed to a big bed.”

Lin Qingyu lowered his lashes. “En.”

Gu Fuzhou said, tone upright and honest, “Then tonight, let’s squeeze in together first.”

With Gu Fuzhou’s body heat, even in winter, sleeping with him under the quilt was warm. Lin Qingyu slept on the inside, facing the wall. Gu Fuzhou hugged him from behind, his chest against his back.

Lin Qingyu has always occupied the bottom bunk. The pillows and quilts were suffused with a light medicinal scent.

After a while, Gu Fuzhou said, “Qingyu, don’t turn your back to me. I’ll end up

pinning you hair down."

Lin Qingyu turned over and faced Gu Fuzhou. "Satisfied? Now, go to sleep."

Gu Fuzhou said, "I'll sleep in a while."

Lin Qingyu subconsciously grabbed the quilt. "What are you waiting for?"

Gu Fuzhou said nothing and kissed him.

The bottom bunk was too small and the two of them were so close together they couldn't hide even the slightest movement from each other. Gu Fuzhou seemed a little surprised, as if he'd found something extraordinary. "Qingyu, you have a reaction."

Lin Qingyu's face burned hot. He forced himself to calm down and said, "Why can't I have a reaction? I'm not Xi Rong."

He was a normal man. When he makes out with someone he likes, naturally, he will have a reaction.

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "That's not what I meant. Didn't you say before that you have no interest in this matter? Because that pair of eyes of yours have seen too much."

Also, Lin Qingyu's temperament was too cold, as though e would never be dominated by worldly desires. For such a beauty to become like becuase of his

kiss, there was nothing in life that could top this.

They had no idea when it happened but the two now changed position, with one on top of the other. Lin Qingyu tried his best to remain calm, “Don’t you want me to have a reaction?”

“How could that be?” Gu Fuzhou pinned his hands on the bed. He leaned over to look at him, “I am honored that you’d be aroused because of me.”

Gu Fuzhou saying this made Lin Qingyu even more ill at ease. “Ignore it. I’ll be fine in a while.”

“Why would I wait a while then?” Gu Fuzhou smiled, “I’ll help you.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes widened slightly.

“No need to be polite. I want to do it. If you feel embarrassed, you can help me out too.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t agree. He also didn’t refuse. Simply keeping quiet.

Gu Fuzhou knew that he was willing. Lin Qingyu wouldn’t be one to act coy regarding tthis matter. But he hoped that Lin Qingyu could say so. He even

badly hoped that Lin Qingyu would take the initiative to invite him.

Gu Fuzhou said in a disappointed tone, “You aren’t willing?”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

Gu Fuzhou put on a look of sadness. “Handling this for myself get my hand sore. Right now, I’m offering to help you out but you’re not even grateful for the offer.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

“Fine, I’ll content myself with staying at the kissing and hugging stage.” Gu Fuzhou heaved a huge sigh of despair. “Who made it so that Doctor Lin would have no interest in this matter? Since I like you, I’ll like you everything about you, including your coldness.”

Lin Qingyu was driven to the edge of his patience. “Enough. If you keep talking, I’m going to wilt.”

Gu Fuzhou seized the opportunity, “Qingyu?”

Lin Qingyu tilted his head, his lashes trembling violently. “…Do as you wish.”

Chapter 87

Lin Qingyu has been reluctant to open his eyes the entire time. In the darkness, unable to see, his sense of touch turned sharper. He felt something drip on his face. He opened his eyes a slit and locked eyes with Gu Fuzhou.

Gu Fuzhou… has been looking at him the whole time. The naivety of youth had disappeared from his eyes, leaving only a mature man's surging undercurrent. Gu Fuzhou had been looking at him like this; his face flushed and his lips slightly parted, revealing an expression that would never normally

appear on his face. Gu Fuzhou's sweat dripped on his face. It was so cold outside but Gu Fuzhou was sweating all over.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but ask, "Are you tired?"

Gu Fuzhou laughed: "No. Why would you think so?"

"If you're not tired, why are you sweating so much?"

Gu Fuzhou shifted and said in an uncertain tone, "Well this… maybe, it's because it's hard to hold back?"

Lin Qingyu was momentarily stunned. He made as if to speak but stopped.

Gu Fuzhou asked with a smile, "Are you going to help me out?"

Lin Qingyu raised his hand; seeming as though ignorant where to put it, he lowered it once again. "Forget it, I'm…not very good at it."

He couldn't do it well to himself, let alone help others.

"Huh? So there are actually things Doctor Lin can't do?" Gu Fuzhou smiled, "But that's no problem. I can teach you. It's very simple…"

Having said that, Gu Fuzhou really grabbed his hand and taught him stroke by

stroke.

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes again, Gu Fuzhou's breath lingering in his ears. Gu Fuzhou would speak to him from time to time—calling him "Qingyu", calling him "Baobei"; even calling him " Laopo" towards the end. The way he sounded calling him "Laopo" almost made his knees go weak. He couldn't help but suspect that the word "Laopo" meant something other than "old woman" in Gu Fuzhou's home dialect, otherwise he simply couldn't accept Gu Fuzhou's hobby.

Fortunately, right at this moment, Gu Fuzhou kissed him. Between his lips and teeth, he temporarily put the whole "old woman" matter behind him. Gu Fuzhou then began showering him with praises; praising him for his long lashes, his beautiful body, his wonderful voice. He kept coaxing him to call him "Lao Gong", nearly making his knees buckle once again.

Lin Qingyu knew that Gu Fuzhou talked a lot, but he really hadn't expected for Gu Fuzhou to be able to speak so openly in bed. Gu Fuzhou's voice was deep and low. Every sentence he uttered seemed to give him a drug of enchantment,

causing strange and unfamiliar reactions to appear within him — of course, this was excluding “Lao Gong and Laopo”, these two words ought to be poison.

Gu Fuzhou got what he wanted and successfully defiled his beautiful wife. Afterwards, he got out of bed without complaint and asked the servants to bring in a basic of hot water.

Sitting on duty in the master bedroom that night were Hua Lu and a momo surnamed Yun. After Yun Momo delivered the hot water and towels handkerchief in, she smiled and said, “The long awaited day has finally come. I was beginning to think the General and the Madam would life out the rest of their lives pure of heart and free of desires.”

Hua Lu asked curiously, “The long awaited day? What day do you mean, momo?”

Yun Momo said, beaming with joy, “The young couple asked for hot water and towels in the middle of the night. Besides that, what else could it be for?”

Hua Lu had a realization and immediately blushed. She had been by Lin Qingyu’s side for so long and yet she had never thought about such a thing. In her eyes, even though the Young Master had married the General, she thought they would continue to be polite and courteous, treating each other as one would honored guests. She never thought that an Immortal-like character like

the Young Master would eventually be dragged into the din of the mortal world by General Gu.

Yun Momo said cheerfully, “In the future, the people on night duty will have a bit more work to do.”

Gu Fuzhou tidied up the scene and changed himself and Lin Qingyu into clean bedclothes. The two then slept embracing each other. Having shared this physical contact without barriers, the relationship between them also shed the inexperience and innocence so unique to youth. After that, the bed in General’s Mansion’s master bedroom was replaced with a large bed. The “long-established” bunk bed was moved back to the study. Whenever the General angered his wife and got kicked out of the bedroom, he could be found in the study, lying on the bunk bed, and reminiscing about the glorious years when the two became sworn brothers.

Winter in the first year of Chuxi came earlier than usual. Before even the end of October, the first snow fell in the capital. Lin Qingyu, dressed in Dayu’s official winter uniform, was walking along a snow-cleared road inside the palace. A eunuch followed him step by step, holding an umbrella steady over his head.

At the entrance of Qinzheng Palace, Lin Qingyu saw his husband and said in surprise, “When did you get here?”

“Half an hour ago. The palace sent over a messenger with an invitation.” Gu Fuzhou looked at the plaque hanging over the palace entrance, “It seems

something big has happened."

After Xiao Jie ascended the throne, Gu Fuzhou started the semi-retirement model. Unless it was a major event like the enthronement ceremony, he rarely entered the palace. Lin Qingyu was worried that he would lose his prestige in the court because of this. As it turns out, his concerns were superfluous. Gu Fuzhou has that ability. While squatting at home, he can also gain insight into the situation in the DPRK and China, and buy people's hearts.

On that day, they supported Xiao Jie to ascend to the throne, and one of the conditions they offered was that they could not tire General Gu. With the

usual small and big trouble, Xi Rong would not disturb Gu Fuzhou, so it must be a big deal to get him to invite Gu Fuzhou to the palace.

The two entered the hall together. Apart from Xiao Jie and Xi Rong, the Empress Dowager was also present. In the presence of the Empress Dowager, Xi Rong restrained himself, behaving him an ordinary eunuch official.

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou greeted Xiao Jie and the Empress Dowager. The Empress Dowager's brows were furrowed and Xiao Jie's small face was as pale as a sheet. "You're here," said the Empress Dowager. "Sit down."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What has happened?"

The Empress Dowager closed her eyes and said, "Xi Rong, bring it here and show it to the General and Imperial Physician Lin."

Xi Rong handed Lin Qingyu a brocade box the size of a palm. Xiao Jie watched as Lin Qingyu open the brocade box. He shrank back in the dragon chair. "Imperial Physician Lin, prepare yourself. Don't be frightened by its content."

Xi Rong's eyes dimmed, barely visible. "Worry not, Your Majesty. Imperial Physician Lin is experienced and knowledgeable. He would not be afraid of anything he sees."

Though he had already guessed that the content would not be anything good, Lin Qingyu still froze when he saw the dried out "strip of flesh" in the brocade

box. Standing behind him, Gu Fuzhou smelled the stench of blood wrapped in cold air. He frowned and asked, “What is this?”

Lin Qingyu quickly closed the brocade box, and said, voice cold, “It’s tongue – human tongue.”

Gu Fuzhou also froze and asked, “Whose?”

Xiao Jie said in a trembling voice, “Zhao Mingwei, General Zhao’s.”

Lin Qingyu felt Gu Fuzhou’s breathing suddenly sink. He himself was feeling suffocated.

Zhao Mingwei, a famous general of the Dayu, was a deputy general under Gu Fuzhou. Although not ever-victorious like Gu Fuzhou, he was nevertheless an great talent adept at utilizing the troops and implementing tactics. After Gu Fuzhou returned to the capital, it was Zhao Mingwei who continued to lead the Northwest army to defend Yong Liang. Over the past year, under his leadership, the Dayu’s Northwest army has been evenly matched against Xixia, both sides having their share of victories and defeats.

Earlier, Zhao Mingwei suddenly sent word that he was expecting to wipe out the Xixia army in one fell swoop. Gu Fuzhou though felt that it wasn’t quite right. Although he had never had the chance to face Xixia’s military counselor face to face, but judging from news from the Northwest Army, it could be seen that this person was a profound mystery, crafty and cunning. He sent a letter to the Emperor, suggesting for Zhao Mingwei to make careful plans before

moving. This order was sent to the northwest. Whether Zhao Mingwei complied with this order was unknown to him.

"Just what is going on?" Lin Qingyu said, "General Zhao… has he given his life for the country?"

Xi Rong looked at Gu Fuzhou and said, "Xixia defeated Zhao Mingwei's army of 200,000 soldiers. General Gu, the Yong Liang that you've defended for more than ten years, has fallen to enemy hands. After being captured, General Zhao committed suicide, laying down his life for the country. Xixia cut off his tongue and together with news of Dayu's great defeat, sent it to the capital."

Yong Liang was an important city in the Northwest. It was the Dayu's strongest line of defense on that border. If this city were to be broken, it could be said that Dayu's gates to the Northwest would be thrown wide open.

"They've gone too far! They're inhuman!" Xiao Jie said in a hoarse voice, "The people of Yong Liang didn't have time to escape and their lives are held in Xixia's hands. General Gu, if Xixia decides to massacre the city and then cut off everyone's tongues, what would we do…"

"This year's winter is colder than two years ago. It has been snowing heavily in the Northwest for several days. Many of the roads used to transport provisions and supplies are blocked. Even going as fast as possible, it would take half a month to travel from Yong Liang to the capital." The Empress Dowager had hand in a tight fist, the nail guard embedding into her palm. "That is to say,

Zhao Mingwei has been dead for half a month. We don't even know what the current situation in Yong Liang is."

Lin Qingyu was silent for a long time. He said, "Xixia has be assaulting Dayu's border for many years, wanting livestock, money and grain. Since they have captured Yong Liang and even General Zhao alive, why not use this to negotiate with the Dayu instead of cutting of General Zhao's tongue as provocation?"

Gu Fuzhou laughed but not a single trace of mirth could be seen on his face. "Probably because that military counselor of Xixia's doesn't want livestock, money and grain."

Xiao Jie asked, "Then what does he want?"

There is a kind of person who likes war, who derives pleasure from devising battle plans in a tent. Only on the battlefield can they feel like their lives have meaning." Gu Fuzhou said coldly, "And so, he hopes that battles between the Dayu and Xixia never ceases."

Xiao Jie was taken aback. "I-is there such a person?"

After a period of silence, the Empress Dowager said, "When the late emperor was still alive, he asked the National Teacher to perform a divination for the fate of the Dayu. The divination foretold of 'the struggle for succession, a marriage to unite with the Northern Border, a demon commander of the Xixia'. In the fight for succession, brothers fought against brothers, the

emperor's heirs withered, numerous civil and military officials lost not only their posts but even their lives. The marriage with the Northern Border resulted in the former Crown Prince's punishment. All things have come to past and they were all related to Dayu's fortune as a nation. The final part, 'a demon commander of the Xixia', could it be this elusive military advisor?"

Xi Rong said, "Your Majesty, Your Highness the Empress Dowager, whether this Xixia military adviser is the one alluded to by the divination matters not for now. Now that Yong Liang has fallen, the Northwest is a host of dragons without a head. With the roads made impassable by heavy snow, funds and provisions cannot be delivered on time. This is a great chance for the Xixia. If we do not oppose this, I am afraid they would be un overpowering force; an invasion of the capital in the future might no longer lay outside the realm of possibility."

The Empress Dowager was quite disgusted by a eunuch's participation in politics, but the situation was urgent and she had to agree with Xi Rong's

statement. “General Gu,” the Empress Dowager’s tone slowed, “Among everyone in country, now only you can save the Northwest.”

Before Gu Fuzhou could answer, Lin Qingyu said, “Not necessarily. The General’s condition has recently relapsed. His old injury has flared up, making him unsuited to go to war.”

With profound meaning, Xi Rong said, “Whether the General’s old injury has recurred, the General should know best.”

Gu Fuzhou said indifferently, “It has recurred.”

Xi Rong narrowed his eyes. The Empress Dowager sighed and said, “Let us summon the ministers to the Qinzheng Hall to discuss matters.”

Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou exchanged not a single word on their way back to the General’s Mansion. Back in their room, Lin Qingyu said, “General Zhao’s matter… I’m sorry for him as well. But you are not allowed to go.”

Gu Fuzhou said slowly, “The army has been missing a general for a long time. If so, Yong Liang…”

“What does Yong Liang have to do with me?” Lin Qingyu said coldly, “I just

want you safe."

Gu Fuzhou shook his head: "It's small, the pattern is small."

"What do you mean?"

"The Xixia military counselor and the Xixia commander are the same person. He is both strategist and general. In "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch", not much is said about this person. But the author noted him as a true genius in the use of military force. You let him burn Yong Liang today and tomorrow, he might attack the capital. By then, I definitely won't survive. And you, most probably,

because of your beauty, you'll be — dammit, just thinking about it makes me furious!"

Lin Qingyu frowned. "So, you really want to go?"

Gu Fuzhou paused and said, "No, but it seems to me there really is no one else."

Lin Qingyu's eyes were cold.

Gu Fuzhou said helplessly, "Baobei, don't be angry. Come and let me give you a hug."

Gu Fuzhou spread his arms and wanted to hug Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu had a calm and collected expression on his face and he stepped back to avoid him. "I won't give you a hug."

Gu Fuzhou wasn't angry at being rejected. He heaved an exaggerated sigh and said, "Is that half-step back of yours real? Small actions can hurt so much."

Lin Qingyu gritted his teeth, "How can you still be in the mood to joke at a time like this? You admitted it yourself; you relied on luck to win those battles. You think you can win against the author-appointed genius?"

"I don't" Gu Fuzhou honestly said, "But when I was studying before, every time I finished a test, I always felt I did badly. But I wound up getting first place

every time.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

Chapter 88

Over the past few days, the civil and military officials have been discussing the fall of Yong Liang. General Wu once again volunteered himself and even Wu Guogong, who was pushing eighty years old, stood up and offered himself for assignment.

The two were filled with fighting spirit, enough to cut their way through thistles and thorns and burn one's boats. Xiao Jie was infected by their vigor but he didn't dare make a decision without authorization. He turned around and asked Empress Dowager Wen, seated behind the bead curtain, "Imperial Mother, what do you…"

What the many minister could never have guessed was that behind that bead curtain, aside from the Empress Dowager, was another person standing. This person was wearing the official uniform of a fifth-grade official. It was none other than the Emperor's trusted and favored Lin Qingyu.

Empress Dowager Wen shook her head and said, "General Wu is an expert at naval warfare. Moreover, he has never fought in the Northwest; Wu Guogong is old and has been living out his retirement in the capital for many years. I'm afraid he will find himself lacking the strenght to match his spirit."

Wu Guogong refused to give in. "Lian Po, the mighty general of Zhao State, fought on the battlefield well into his eighties. I have not even reached eighty, I

can still fight!"

Xiao Jie sat uneasy on the dragon throne. "Could it be that there is no one else… Uh, except for General Gu."

"How can there be anyone else? Over the years, Dayu's generals have died, been wounded or crippled. A great number of them have been imprisoned, implicated in the struggle for succession. The Dayu's military leadership are like yellow autumn crops that cannot last until the green crops of spring. We are the only ones who can be used, these handful of poeple." The corners of General Wu's lips pulled down. "Your Majesty, Your Highness the Empress Dowager, although this minister has never been to the Northwest, all wars are in their core the same. Since General Gu is unwilling to go, allow this minister to try."

It wasn't difficult to hear that when General Wu mentioned "General Gu", his tone was no longer as reverent as before. Last year, when the late Emperor wanted Gu Fuzhou to return to the Northwest to replace Zhao Mingwei, Gu Fuzhou had declined, citing lingering poison as his reason. At the time, both General Wu and Wu Guogong stood by Gu Fuzhou.

However, this time was different from the past. The situation in the Northwest was desperate. Zhao Mingwei had been disgraced and Xixia had gone so far as to cut off his tongue in blatant provocation. At this time, anyone who would call themselves a general, so long as they still had breath left, would go to the battlefield without any hesitation. But Gu Fuzhou was still the same as the year

before; saying that he was not feeling well, he closed the door to all visitors and even refused to attend morning court.

General Gu… had let them down.

The Empress Dowager hesitated and she looked to Lin Qingyu, “Imperial Physician Lin, what do you think?”

Lin Qingyu was about to speak when Xiao Songzi hurried over, coming in from the side door, “Your Highness, Imperial Physician Lin, an urgent report from the Northwest.”

The Empress Dowager opened the letter and quickly scanned its contents, an extremely ugly expression forming on her face. “The Xixia capital has issued a declaration of war, vowing to avenge the Prince of Xixia who died in the battle of Yong Liang ten years ago. The letter says that they demand that the Dayu send Gu Fuzhou to the front line. They wish to take him down in a just and

honorable manner. Else, the Xixia army will slaughter Yong Liang City after a month."

Ten years ago, the former crown prince of Xixia was killed by General Gu using the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear.

Lin Qingyu took the letter, his hand seeming to grow heavier and heavier. He said nothing, his face turning terrifyingly sombre.

The Empress Dowager called out, "Imperial Physician Lin…" She hesitated for a moment and then said, "Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu gave an "en". He then came back to his senses, realizing that the was still in morning court.

"This court has no other general save for General Gu who is qualified to lead the army in the Northwest. What's more, if he doesn't go, is this court to abandon the tens upon thousands of people in Yong Liang?" The Empress

Dowager sighed, “When the nest is overturned, no egg will escape uncracked. Today, Xixia slaughters Yong Liang, tomorrow, they will slaughter the capital.”

Lin Qingyu sneered, “There is no need for the Empress Dowager to educate this official on the obvious. Everyone understands this truth.”

The Empress Dowager hesitated, “Then, should we tell the ministers about this matter?”

Lin Qingyu found that he could no longer think quietly, so he could only go with his intuition. He said, “We won’t say anything for now.”

After the court was dismissed, Xiao Songzi found Lin Qingyu and told him, “Imperial Physician Lin, just now when this servant was delivering the urgent report, I ran into General Gu. The general has already read this urgent report.”

Lin Qingyu’s felt suffocted. He asked, “Where is he now?”

“The General said that he is waiting for you in the imperial garden.”

When Lin Qingyu found Gu Fuzhou, Gu Fuzhou was sitting by the pond, absent-mindedly feeding the fish. Dozens of brightly colored koi were kept in the pond in the Imperial Garden, adding a touch of color to the monotonous winter day.

Gu Fuzhou sprinkled a handful of fish food, and the koi rushed over, scrambling for food. Seeing Lin Qingyu’s reflection in the water, he said,

“Look at the fish in this pond. They were born in the palace. They’ve been fed so well that they’ve grown so fat. They’re never any less so why do they have to fight over the food?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Because there is no limit to greed.”

Gu Fuzhou agreed. “That makes sense.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Since you’re here, why didn’t you attend morning court?”

Gu Fuzhou threw over the rest of the fish food and said, “There’s no seat for me in Zichen Palace and it’s too tiring to stand.”

“If anyone heard you say that, they would accuse you of being disloyal.” Apart from the emperor, the oly one who could sit in Zichen Palace was the Empress Dowager who was holding court behind the curtain.

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, “That would be an unjust accusation. Being an emperor is a difficult job and I have no interest in it.”

Gu Fuzhou’s words were funny. Lin Qingyu wanted to smile like usual but he couldn’t bring himself to smile. He asked, “You saw the report from the Northwest.”

Gu Fuzhou nodded and sighed, “What should I do, Qingyu? This time, it seems

I really have to go."

The word "not necessarily" stuck in Lin Qingyu's throat; he was unable to come out with these words.

"For the past few days, the entire court has been criticizing me. General Wu came looking for me yesterday. Carried away by his emotions, he pointed at me and scolded me for being a coward — it was completely laughable." Saying so, Gu Fuzhou actually laughed out loud, as if this entire matter was absolutely ridiculous. "Although, I had been digging my own grave, but to get Wu Zhan so riled up like this, someone must be have been adding oil and vinegar."

Lin Qingyu had also come to the same conclusion. "Indeed."

"No matter who it is, his goal has been achieved. If I don't go to the Northwest, I will gradually lose the court's goodwill. How can those hot-blooded men still serve me in the future? A general who doesn't wish to go the battlefield, without any prestige in the army, he would be unable to protect even his own

wife." Gu Fuzhou pressed the space between his eyebrows. "Now, Xixia is threatening the lives of the people of Yong Liang. – It so annoying."

Lin Qingyu listened to Gu Fuzhou in silence. He said, "So, you want to go."

Gu Fuzhou said, "It's not that I want to go, it's that I have to go."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "You really care about the people."

"Because you're also a member of 'the people'." Gu Fuzhou didn't hesitate, "By protecting them, I am also protecting you."

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes slowly and whispered, "I don't want your protection and I don't want to be a saint who cares about the common people. I just want to be with you."

Gu Fuzhou explained patiently, "How many of the Xixia has General Gu struck down? Xixia is obviously coming for me this time. Xixia must be completely defeated. I can hide for a time but I can't hide forever."

Lin Qingyu sarcastically said, "Are you really stating the obvious to me as well?"

"I'm not…"

Lin Qingyu interrupted him coldly, "Have you ever thought about it? Just what

am I supposed to do if you meet the unexpected?"

Gu Fuzhou was stunned.

Lin Qingyu's voice trembled slightly, "On that snowy night two years ago, I knelt in front of your wheelchair and watched as you died. I felt your hand slowly grow cold in mine. Back then, not knowing my feelings, I managed to endure the pain of losing my husband. But now, if I have to go through that again…"

Gu Fuzhou's Adam's apple bobbed. He said, voice hoarse, "Qingyu…"

"It's not the losing that is scary. What's scary is to getting you back and losing you again." Lin Qingyu looked at his hands and murmured, "This is too cruel even for me."

Gu Fuzhou said in a low voice, "I'm sorry, Qingyu. But this time, I will definitely try my very best to come back. Look, I'll even written you a letter of guarantee."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Back then, didn't you also try your hardest to live longer? And what was the result? Before you died, you even apologized to me; you said sorry to me, saying that you've worked hard, but you couldn't hold on until the day Xiao Cheng died – Have you forgotten all this?"

"I hadn't forgotten. But I was so sick at the time that doing my best was no use. But it's different now. I have a healthy body and with hard work, I'll be able to

perform miracles." Gu Fuzhou smiled, "Beside, Qingyu, I haven't even set off yet. It's unlucky to be overthinking things like this."

Lin Qingyu couldn't help but ask, "Are you really not worried at all?"

Gu Fuzhou thought about it and said, "Actually, I am a little scared."

Lin Qingyu stared at him.

"I'm scared of not doing well and that people who trust me might die because of my wrong decisions. I'm afraid of being tired, of being in pain. And I hate the taste of losing. But more that all that, I'm afraid–…" The voice stopped abruptly. The words reached Gu Fuzhou's lips, but he swallowed them back down. He said leisurely, "That's why a person like me could never be the protagonist."

Lin Qingyu knew that Gu Fuzhou was using his same old routine to try to coax him, trying to ease the atmosphere. But Lin Qingyu couldn't help but to follow his words and ask, "Why do you say this?"

"Because a story's male protagonist is either somoene very powerful and can easily crush his opponents, or someone who has a pure heart, who despite knowing he can't do something, does it nonetheless. And I," Gu Fuzhou spread

his hands, “I don’t have any great strength. I’m lazy and a coward. It’s no wonder I could only transmigrate to supporting roles in a book.”

“You’re wrong.” Lin Qingyu said, “Lu Wancheng, Gu Fuzhou, they may be supporting roles. But when you came, they became the protagonists.”

Gu Fuzhou’s eyes filled with a smile. “You’re getting pretty good at that, Doctor Lin. But you are also wrong. It is because I managed to find my way to your side, basking in the light of the Great Beauty, that Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou became the book’s protagonist. Qingyu, do you still remember, what is a protagonist?”

Lin Qingyu repeated what Gu Fuzhou once said, word for word, “The so-called ‘protagonist’ is the one who no matter how many glits and flashes of swords and daggers, how much foul wind and bloody rain he has experienced,

no matter if its during the moment he crawls out of the quagmire, he will always be the most dazzling one."

Gu Fuzhou snapped his fingers and said in a relaxed tone, "That's right. Xiao Cheng is dead. We've replaced him as the protagonist. Now, we're the ones with the protagonist's halo. So, we won't die so easily."

Lin Qingyu couldn't agree with this statement. He was silent for a moment. Then suddenly, he looked at Gu Fuzhou and said, "Xu Junyuan."

Gu Fuzhou said, "Qingyu, have you gone crazy? I'm your husband, not Xu Junyuan."

Lin Qingyu was in a rare state of impatience. "In those days, it was Xu Junyuan who used your Eight Characters to figure out whether you were destined to die. We can ask him to do a divination to see whether you will emerge victorious and return safely to the capital."

Gu Fuzhou said "Oh". He seemed to think it was useless to consult with Xu Junyuan, but in order not to spoil Lin Qingyu's happiness, he said nonetheless, "That makes sense."

Lin Qingyu immediately said, "It's not too late now. I'll order someone to prepare the carriage."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "You and I are both powerful ministers. Why would you need to go to Changsheng Temple to find him? — Have him come.

Call Xu Junyuan to the palace, say the Emperor wishes to see him."

Chapter 89.1

An hour later, Xu Junyuan arrived at the palace. He was led by the eunuch to the Imperial Garden, where he saw not the Emperor but saw a pair of outstanding men.

Xu Junyuan was not at all surprised. On the contrary, he was even able to talk cheerfully and joke with the, “Ever was it that great beauties accompanied heroes. Seeing the two of you from afar, I must be forgiven for thinking I have entered into some painting of a beauty. If Imperial Physician Lin had worn plain white, enhancing each other’s beauty with this winter snowscape, that would have been even better.” As he said that, he nodded his greeting to the two of them, “Greetings, General Gu, Doctor Lin.”

Lin Qingyu went straight to the point. “I invited the National Teacher to the Palace because I would like for you to perform a divination for General Gu.”

Xu Junyuan raised his eyebrows. “It was actually Imperial Physician Lin who called me? But the officials who came to Changsheng Temple clearly said that it was the Emperor who wished to see me. Is there some sort of misunderstanding?”

Gu Fuzhou said: “What’s the difference? The Emperor is occupied with a myriad of state affairs. Naturally, he cannot attend to everything personally.

My wife and I are acting under orders. Is there something the National Teacher is dissatisfied with?"

Xu Junyuan said in a playful tone. "I would not dare. May I ask Imperial Physician Lin, what regarding the General would you wish me to divine?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I would like the National Teacher to divine for the General what you divined for my late husband, Young Master Hou."

Xu Junyuan looked embarrassed: "This… I'm afraid it would be improper."

Lin Qingyu's eyes twitched. "And why would that be?"

"I perform only one divination for each matter, that's all. I used Jiang Gongzi's Eight Characters to find out whether he was destined to die two years ago. That was the divination." Xu Junyuan's expression remained as usual while he mentioned the name 'Jiang Gongzi', as though it were already a consensus among the three of them. "Now, General Gu wishes for a divination on the same matter. Might I ask, is General Gu intending to use his own Eight Characters or Jiang Gongzi's? If it is the former, General Gu already died in battle two years ago. If it is the latter, using the same Eight Characters to

forcibly perform a divination would be akin to catching the moon on the water."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "As expected, the National Teacher all-knowing."

"Doctor Lin offers undue praise." Xu Junyuan said with a smile, "I simply know a little more than others."

"Being in possession of such superhuman skill, why can you not perform two divinations?"

Xu Junyuan said, "The Way of Heaven is not for us to see. To be able to see it one, is already a blessing. Repeated scrying might well result in disaster."

"Ridiculous." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "I must insist that you perform a divination today."

Xu Junyuan was helpless. "As I have already said, were I to forcibly perform a divination what we gleam will not be of the Way of Heaven."

"Qingyu." Gu Fuzhou grabbed Lin Qingyu, "Talking with him is useless."

Last year, on the anniversary of Lu Wancheng's death, Lin Qingyu woke up in the middle of the night, completely distraught. It took a lot for Gu Fuzhou to able to coax him. He even wrote him a letter of guarantee. What Lin Qingyu didn't know was that Gu Fuzhou went to Changsheng Temple alone the next day, insisting that Xu Junyuan perform a divination for him; he practically had

his blade to Xu Junyuan's neck. Regardless, all he got were the same excuses as today's.

Lin Qingyu swept his eyes away coldly. "You already knew?"

Gu Fuzhou was noncommittal. He said, "If the National Teacher truly knew all about life and death, he should just change his name to Xu 'Book of Life and Death' Junyuan. In the end, all he is is just another mortal. The things he can know of are limited."

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "As expected of one who has gone through life and death. The General truly sees things clearly. Life and death, wealth and poverty — these are all destined. I hope that Imperial Physician Lin will not insist."

Lin Qingyu's gaze turned sharp. "Despite your wishes, I've already insisted many times. What's one more?"

Xu Junyuan said, "Then all I can ask is for Imperial Physician Lin to trust Jiang Gongzi. He was chosen by Heaven, travelling from afar. Naturally, he has his own strengths. Although I cannot divine Gu Fuzhou's fate, I am willing to

believe in Jiang Gongzi. The favored son of Heaven will be unexpectedly rescued from desperate situations."

"The National Teacher is still the same." Gu Fuzhou groaned, "Listen to your words is ten years of study in vain."

Xu Junyuan said with a hearty smile, "You flatter me. You simply flatter me."

Gu Fuzhou had yet to express his position about undertaking a military expedition. More and more letters to Emperor asking for battle assignment reached Lin Qingyu's hands. Most of these officers were generals below fourth rank. Each with their own merits and drawbacks. They were suitable to lead the vanguard but they were hardly commander-in-chief material. One of them caught Gu Fuzhou's attention—Wu Youyuan, Wu Guogong's grandson, a seventeen-year-old general, who was currently training in the Imperial Guards.

"Wu Youyuan?" Gu Fuzhou said, "Wu Guogong's grandson?"

"Yes, that's him." Lin Qingyu asked, "Do you recognize him?"

"I've met him once or twice. The little guy's quite handsome. And he's a General Gu fanboy. This person was mentioned in the extras for "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch". It is said that Wu Youyuan inherited Gu Fuzhou's last wish and led Xixia's fall within ten years. I once entertained the thought of recommending him to be sent to the Northwest, but he was too young. He wasn't developed yet. In the original book, he suffered numerous defeats in his

youth. It was only past the age of twenty-five when he became increasingly steady, gradually revealing his talent as a general."

Lin Qingyu said: "Seventeen years old, the same age as when you first came to the Dayu."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Yeah. When I was seventeen, I was raising birds and playing Touhu in the Hou's Mansion. While here we have someone already thinking about winning honor on the battlefield."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Do you want him to go?"

Gu Fuzhou said, "Given his current qualifications, he certainly qualified to command but being a vanguard shouldn't be a problem."

After Lin Qingyu weighed the matter and said, "If he wants to go then take him with him. If he stays in the capital, he won't be able to reach the heights he had in the original book. One doesn't attain something like that without experiencing the storm. When you arrive in the Northwest, look after him a

bit. Don't let him tread the same old road and act rashly for the sake of momentary impetuousness."

Gu Fuzhou grasped the main point. "So, you're agreeing to let me go?"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "Whether I agree or not, wouldn't you still go?"

Gu Fuzhou gave a low laugh and said, "Life is already so difficult as is. There are some things that Doctor Lin shouldn't expose."

Early the next morning, in the main hall, Gu Fuzhou, down on one knee, said sternly, "During this time of great peril for the Dayu, this minister is willing to put his own life on the line to keep the Northwest safe. This minister, Gu Fuzhou, asks for battle assignment."

As soon as the words were out, the military officers were filled with joy. Wu Zhan clenched his fists in excitement. "I knew it! I knew it! What did I say? General Gu would never simply sit back and watch!"

"With General Gu in the Northwest, retaking Yong Liang will be just around the corner!"

"General Gu, you must cut out the tongues of those Xixia scoundrels to avenge General Zhao!"

Wu Guogong showed a gratified smile. The corners of Xi Rong's lips ticked up silently, a secret calculation flashed in his eyes. Even the Empress Dowager

Wen had an expression of relief.

Everyone was happy that Gu Fuzhou had taken the initiative to ask for a battle assignment. Only Lin Qingyu, standing behind the dragon chair, looked down at the ministers, his eyes gloomy.

The emperor's imperial countenance looked well-pleased. He immediately granted Gu Fuzhou's request for assignment. Furthermore, he appointed Wu Youyuan as vanguard.

There wasn't much time left until Xixia's threatened day of slaughter. The Son of Heaven gave Gu Fuzhou three days to prepare. Three days later, Gu Fuzhou would lead the reinforcements from the capital to the Northwest.

Before the expedition, Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou each had important things to do. The servant on night duty have not brought hot water to the Masters' bedroom for many nights. It can easily be seen where these two's thoughts were.

At that time, the General's Mansion, rather than be gloomy and dismal was actually blanketed in an atmosphere of awe. Huan Tong and most of the household thought that the General's expedition was a matter of lofty sentiments and great aspirations. They believed he would return triumphantly in the future. While women like Hua Lu worried about sightless blades on the battlefield — after all, the General's numerous wounds didn't simply appear

out of nowhere. However, they couldn't do much. All they could do was a lot more care into the stitches they sewed on the General's clothes.

Lin Qingyu met two people in succession in the Mansion. One Hu Ji. Hu Ji used to be the favored Imperial Physician of the former crown prince and Chen Shi but these two parted from the former Emperor. Concubine Chen moved to Jinyang Garden and with no prince or concubine in the palace, Hu Ji found himself with a lot more time on his hands. Part of his time was spent on treating the palace maids and eunuchs.

Lin Qingyu asked Hu Ji if he would be willing to accompany the army as their medic. Hu Ji agreed instantly. The Northwest has just experienced several major defeats and along with it countless casualties. This was where his skills would be best put to use. As a doctor, Hu Ji would advance courageously to wherever he was needed.

Hu Ji's medical skills dwarfed most of his peers'. Moreover, he has been Lin Qingyu's good friend for many years. Lin Qingyu could trust him. After that, Lin Qingyu wrote another letter and asked Zhang Shiquan to take it Zhu Yongxin in Shuzhou. When Shen Huaishi bid him goodbye, he told him that Zhu Yongxin would know his whereabouts should he seek him out for something in the future.

Shen Huaishi, though unversed in the art of war, was skilled in martial arts. He has spent his life learning skills of assassination of protection needed to serve

as shadow guard to the royal family. If he was willing to go to the Northwest to help Gu Fuzhou, Lin Qingyu would be greatly relieved.

While Lin Qingyu was exhausting all this thoughts and ingenuity, the numerous military officers were at the cavalry camp, holding a farewell dinner for Gu Fuzhou. Drinking alcohol was not allowed in the barracks, so they simply roasted a freshly slaughtered fattened sheep and used tea instead of wine; wishing the general a great victory and triumphant return.

From the looks of them, it seemed that they genuinely felt that as long as the undefeated Gu Fuzhou goes to the Northwest, all the problems would be solved.

Wu Guogong patted Gu Fuzhou on the shoulder and said, “Brother Fuzhou, I will be entrusting my incompetent grandson to you. That kid has been learning the ways of the battlefield with me since he was a child. He has some real ability. On his first campaign, I’m not asking that he make any grand accomplishments, only that he not hold you back.”

Gu Fuzhou responded with a slight smile but in his heart he was urging Wu Youyuan to grow quickly so that he could take him to win while lying down.

“General, I’m sorry. I shouldn’t have said that you were…you were…” Wu Zhan heaved a great sigh and said, ashamed, “I hope that the General, in his moral

superiority, not take to heart the offenses made by a base person such as myself. I ask that you not lower yourself to my level, to that of boor."

Gu Fuzhou said, "Of course. But I need you to stay in the capital and help me with something."

"The General need but command, I shall shrink from no sacrifice!"

Gu Fuzhou cast him a meaningful look and Wu Zhan readily took the hint. The two moved away from the crowd and went to a secluded place. Gu

Fuzhou said, “I’m going to the Northwest and I do not know when I will return. Truly, I worry about leaving my wife alone in the capital.”

“Is the General talking about Imperial Physician Lin?” Wu Zhan couldn’t understand. “Imperial Physician Lin is favored by both His Majesty and the Empress Dowager. What could possibly happen to him?”

Gu Fuzhou said slowly, “I too hope that I am simply thinking too much. But just in case, I wish to leave him a ‘blade’ in the capital to protect him well.”

“A blade?” Wu Zhan said with a bitter face, “General, if you have something to say, just say it directly. My mind is not one for twists and turns.”

Gu Fuzhou lowered his voice, “I want you to hide a group of soldiers in the capital for me.”

For hot-blooded men, tea was fundamentally unsatisfying. Some people suggested that they take a page of out the scholars’ book and commission a pleasure boat on the Jinshui River. They would order a few pots of good wine and find some beautiful singers to entertain everyone. Everyone agreed. But when they went to ask General Gu’s opinion, hair nor hide of the General could be found in the barracks.

Chapter 89.2

Gu Fuzhou stepped into the yard, took off his cloak and threw it to the servants. “Qingyu, I’m going to burst. I ate most of a leg of lamb by myself today.”

Lin Qingyu stood by the table and smiled. “Just right then. The kitchen hadn’t prepared much of anything for tonight; just a bowl of longevity noodles. I think you should still be able to fit that in.”

“Longevity noodles?” Gu Fuzhou stepped forward and saw two bowls of steaming noodles in soup on the table. It was topped with chopped green onions and a soft-boiled egg. “Oh…my birthday is coming up.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Your birthday will be spent on the road. That being the case, celebrating it two days earlier should be fine.”

Gu Fuzhou lowered his head and kissed Lin Qingyu’s forehead. “This is amazing. Thank you, Baobei. I’ll wash my hands first.”

Lin Qingyu watched Gu Fuzhou turn around. The smile on the corner of his lips faded. When Gu Fuzhou came back, he smiled again.

The two sat down at the table. Lin Qingyu instructed Gu Fuzhou, “You can’t

bite off the noodles."

Gu Fuzhou laughed. "When did you start believing this?"

Lin Qingyu was momentarily at a loss. That's right, he had never believed these things before. "Probably, since Lu Wancheng's death."

Gu Fuzhou paused. He picked up the chopsticks and said with a smile, "Then I'll finish it in one go."

The two were eating noodles when Huan Tong came in to report, saying that the Young Master of the Wu Guogong's Mansion was asking to see him. Lin Qingyu asked, "Is it Wu Youyuan?"

"It should be." Gu Fuzhou wiped his mouth with a hand towel. "Ask him to wait in the front hall. I'll be with him right away."

Lin Qingyu said, "I'll go with you."

The handsome seventeen-year-old, dressed in the armor of the Imperial Guards, was full of vigor and seemingly boundless endless energy. As soon as

he saw Gu Fuzhou, he even forgot to salute in his haste to say, “General, I have thought of a way to break Xixia’s Ground Fire Formation!”

Before he finished speaking, Wu Youyuan caught sight of the man behind the General and as though he had bitten down on his tongue, he stared blankly for a while.

Gu Fuzhou raised his eyebrows and asked, “Pretty?”

Lin Qingyu gave Gu Fuzhou a warning look.

Wu Youyuan nodded blankly. “Pretty.”

“You’re right, he’s pretty.” Everyone likes looking at great beauties and Gu Fuzhou wouldn’t be jealous over such a trivial matter. If he ate vinegar every time someone looked a little too long then he and Lin Qingyu don’t have time

to do anything else; they wouldn't be able to finish off all the vinegar. "You may call him 'Madam'."

Wu Youyuan calmed down and hurriedly cupped his hands in salute. "Wu Youyuan greets the General's wife."

Gu Fuzhou asked, "You came to me to discuss military strategy with me?"

Wu Youyuan then remembered the purpose of his visit and his excitement was reignited. "Exactly! General, the Ground Fire Formation seems insurmountable but there is a flaw that is extremely difficult to notice…"

Lin Qingyu said, "General, why don't you take the little General to the study?"

"Alright." Gu Fuzhou was helpless, "Come with me."

Lin Qingyu sent the two off to the study. After ordering Hua Lu to serve them tea, he then went to the medicine room.

This was the last night before Gu Fuzhou was to set off. He originally intended to spend a good night with the great beauty; better if they were able to do a something-something. Unexpectedly, in the end, he had to listen to Wu Youyuan rant about military strategy for two whole hours. Seeing that the curfew was approaching, Wu Youyuan reluctantly took his leave.

When Gu Fuzhou returned to the room, Lin Qingyu had just finished bathing and was drying his wet hair with a towel. Gu Fuzhou walked to stand behind

him. Movements all natural, he took the towel from Lin Qingyu's hand and sighed, "'The righteous ardor of youth and the epic of the young has just begun'."

Lin Qingyu let Gu Fuzhou wipe his long hair for him. He asked, "Who are you talking about?"

"Wu Youyuan, naturally."

"What about you?" Lin Qingyu said, "Do you not count yourself among the youth anymore?"

"I'm no longer young." Gu Fuzhou was quite sad, "I only just realized I'm old when I saw the seventeen year old Wu Youyuan."

Lin Qingyu reminded him, "In terms of actual age, you're only twenty years old."

Gu Fuzhou sighed, "Isn't it because this body hasn't a drop of youthfulness in it? And my mentality has grown old along with it."

"That's not possible."

"Hm?"

"Even using the body of a thirty-three-year-old man, I can still feel the so-

called ‘youthfulness’ in you.”

Gu Fuzhou made no reply. He just looked at Lin Qingyu, a slight smile on his face.

Lin Qingyu glanced at him. “What are you looking at me for?”

“You’re really good at sweet talking.” Gu Fuzhou locked eyes with Lin Qingyu through the bronze mirror, “This is the first time you’ve been in a relationship. Where did you learn how to do that?”

“I’m just telling the truth. How did that become sweet-talking in your ears?”

Gu Fuzhou exclaimed, “It’s too good. You’re just too good. Say something more. It’s so nice to hear them.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

When Lin Qingyu’s hair was almost dry, Gu Fuzhou thought of something and asked, “By the way, where is my Qingyun Kyushu Spear?”

Lin Qingyu said, “It should still be gathering dust in the corner.”

The Qingyun Kyushu Spear that ordinary people wouldn’t be able carry even with both hands, Gu Fuzhou easily picked up with one hand. “Good, picking

this up is still quite easy." Gu Fuzhou said, "My two-hour-a-day weight lifting training has not been in vain."

Lin Qingyu frowned, "Didn't you say would only be strategizing in a tent?"

"From time to time, I'm still going to need to life the Qingyun Kyushu Spear and put on a show in front of the soldiers. If I look around all lost when I draw my weapon, wouldn't I be shaming the General?"

Gu Fuzhou was cleaning his spear under the lamp and Lin Qingyu kept him company. Suddenly, he said, "I'll go with you to the Northwest."

As soon Lin Qingyu said it, he started to regret it. Given their current situation, if he and Gu Fuzhou were to both leave the capital, Xi Rong would see to it that there would be no place for them in the capital when they

returned. While Gu Fuzhou fought in the Northwest, he had tos tay in the capital, so that he could maintain the delicate balance at present.

Fortunately, Gu Fuzhou didn't take his words seriously at all. "You won't go."

"You know?"

Gu Fuzhou nodded. "I know, because our Doctor Lin isn't the love-addled sort."

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "I actually wish I were love-addled."

Just like Jingchun and the King of the North — not caring about anything, not minding anything. They just want to stay together, never to part.

"I wouldn't want that." Gu Fuzhou looked at him with a smile filled with affection and admiration, "As eternal as heaven and earth, as brilliant as the sun and moon'; this is my Doctor Lin."

Lin Qingyu chuckled and said, "You've memorized the "Nine Chapters" so well. How come you couldn't the "Book of Songs"?"

Gu Fuzhou knew that Lin Qingyu was pertaining to the failed confession during the Latern Festival. He said with a smile, "It's different. At that time, you made me nervous."

Thinking back to that day, it seemed like it was just yesterday. The gorgeous

lanterns all over the city, the crowds a surging tide, the laughter ringing all around… and Lin Qingyu's "I like you too".

Gu Fuzhou stared at the sharp point of the spear and muttered, "Qingyu, I'm actually…a little scared."

Lin Qingyu stood up and ordered him. "Put down the Qingyun Kyushu Spear."

Gu Fuzhou did as he was told. Lin Qingyu approached slowly, the flickering candlelight reflected on the beauty, making him appear as though shrouded in mist. He raised his hand and untied his belt. The robe slipped down to his ankles. His slender and alabaster body appeared uncovered in front of Gu Fuzhou's very eyes.

Skin like cold jade, red spots are like cherry blossoms; his long hair hung down his beautiful back. He appeared as an immortal, with beauty beyond compare.

"Give me your hand." Lin Qingyu said.

Gu Fuzhou's eyes darkened, his breathing quickened but he said with a smile, "What are you doing, Baobei? Seducing me?"

"No." Lin Qingyu opened Gu Fuzhou's hand and put the ointment he had prepared in his palm, "I'm here—inviting you."

Gu Fuzhou's pupils widened. His whole figure seemed to be pinned to his chair, unable to move. He forced himself to lower his head but it was arrested

by Lin Qingyu's hand on his chin, forcing Gu Fuzhou to look at him. He had no other choice but to look at this great beauty without a single inch of thread on him.

"If you're scared of getting tired, I'll do it myself."

Gu Fuzhou said with difficulty, "How about you invite me again once I come back?"

"Why do I have to wait until you're back?" Without warning, Lin Qingyu's eyes turned red. "Is it for the same reason you refused to tell me your name in that dream back then?"

Gu Fuzhou took the fox fur cloak hanging to one side and draped it over Lin Qingyu. "Of course not. Think about it. This journey will take half a year at least. At most, three or five. If you let me eat meat now, let me eat marrow and know the taste of it, then throw me to the Northwest to be a vegetarian; who could possibly bear that? Better I endure it for a while yet. Like you said, it's harder to have it and lose it than not have it at all."

If he hadn't tacked on that last sentence, Gu Fuzhou's words would have still been funny. Lin Qingyu curled his lips but there was a bit of sadness in his expression. Gu Fuzhou could see that Lin Qingyu didn't believe what he said, only that he pretended to believe.

Neither of them said anything to expose it. Gu Fuzhou was afraid that Lin Qingyu would catch a cold so he carried him onto the bed and wrapped him

tightly with the quilt. Lin Qingyu did not resist. He lowered his eyebrows, looking as though he was at the other's complete mercy. Suddenly, as if thinking of something, he grabbed Gu Fuzhou by the front of his robe and said impatiently, "You wrote me a letter of guarantee."

"Yes, I wrote you a letter of guarantee." Gu Fuzhou got into the bed and took the fragile beauty into his arms, "If I go back on my word, you can go to the King Yama of Hell and tell on me."

Lin Qingyu said softly, "I want to hide you, lock you up, so that you can't go anywhere. I want you to only stay by my side, look only at me."

Gu Fuzhou raised Lin Qingyu's face and took a closer look at his expression. He saw the cruel and ruthless beauty looking at a loss, his eyes misty, as though trying his hardest to restrain something. Gu Fuzhou hugged him tighter and said with a smile, "That's exactly what I want. You'd better find a chain to tie

me up so that besides eating, drinking and sleeping, all that I could ever do is do things with you."

Lin Qingyu smiled reluctantly, huddling in even closer to Gu Fuzhou. "Good idea." After a while, he finally made up his mind. "Go, but you must come back —you must come back."

Gu Fuzhou didn't say much at this time. He stroked Lin Qingyu's long hair lightly and only replied, "Okay."

In the first year of Chuxi, during the time of Lesser Snow, Gu Fuzhou took command of the battle expedition. The Son of Heaven, together with the civil and military officials, saw them off at the gate of the city.

Gu Fuzhou looked up and saw Lin Qingyu standing behind Xiao Jie above the city gate, almost standing level with him. He was wearing reddish black court dress, a snow cape with an edging of white mink fur around his neck. His temperament was as cold as the moon, but the rising sun cast a warm red glow

upon him, making his face appear as though tinted with a rosy red. Bright eyes were concealed by the dazzling light.

When their eyes met, Lin Qingyu opened her red lips slightly, mouthing six words.

Gu Fuzhou only heard the wind blowing but he could see that what Lin Qingyu had said: I will wait for your return.

After this, Lin Qingyu said two more words. Looking at shapes his mouth made, it didn't look like "General Gu", nor like "My husband", let alone "Fuzhou".

Gu Fuzhou thought for a while. The corners of his lips raised slightly. He then pulled on the reins and turned his horse's head. He said to Wu Youyuan beside him, "Let's go."

When Gu Fuzhou turned around, a team of elite imperial guards followed behind him, leaving the capital in a mighty procession.

Afterward, he never took a look back. No matter whether he was forced or not, no matter what the odds were, once he left, he did so looking dashing and at ease. Entirely different from the young man who said "I'm actually a little

scared" in front of Lin Qingyu last night. He left just like… like when he'd said goodbye to him in a dream.

He never looked back at him even once.

The call of a horn, the sombre tune from a lute; the hero astride an armored horse, the banner half unfurled. He fought for 3,000 miles and won fame to last for all ages.

At this moment, smile for the young hero; bear not bitterness for years of separation. In the future, separated by mountains and passes, towering heights and long roads, one's only wish, while fighting a hundred battles over the Yellow Sands, forgot not your hometown in the capital, that during long nights someone gazes out into the horizon, waiting for his husband's return.

Chapter 90

Half a month later, Gu Fuzhou led the reinforcements to the Northwest. Lin Qingyu was once again half a country away from him. His only consolation was that this time they could at least write to each other, a privilege bestowed upon them by His Majesty.

Every report sent to the capital from the Northwest would have with it a letter from General Gu to his wife; both letters though were sent directly Lin Qingyu's desk.

Although the report and the personal letter were written by the same person, their styles were quite different. The report was concise and to the point, the wording was appropriate, speaking only of military affairs. During this period, under the leadership of the demon commander, the Xixia army was an irresistible force. After occupying Yongliang, they captured several more strategic towns in the Northwest. After Gu Fuzhou led the reinforcements from the capital, in any case, he stabilized the troops' morale and elevated their fighting spirit.

Under the fierce offensive of the Xixia Army, the Dayu's army established a last line of defense at Guizhou City. They were to defend this position to the death. Once Guizhou City falls, the Dayu's gates would be thrown wide open in the

Northwest. If that happens, Xixia would be free to claim the Jiangnan Flatlands as it withdraws or charge directly to the capital as they proceed.

When all was said and done, Gu Fuzhou was a man who had climbed atop a city gate and directed its defense while covered in his quilt. He was a man who knew something of defending a city. The Northwest Army and the reinforcements worked together as one and they halted the Xixia Army's advance, stopping them outside Guizhou City.

These were written simply in the report. Only the results were stated; the process and details were all left out. However, just by looking at the number of casualties, one could tell how difficult a feat this was. On the other hand, Gu Fuzhou's letter home was written thus:

"Qingyu, you won't believe me but since I came to the Northwest, I haven't slept a single wink. Do you now see my determination to triumph?

After an evening meeting with the generals, I walked out of the tent and saw the stars overhead. The stars in the Northwest are so very bright. I suddenly wished you were by my side.

That demon commander is quite impressive. I don't think I'm a match for him. But Wu Youyuan appears very confident. He can talk nonstop about tactics for

hours on end — I tried following his words and afterwards I started losing hair in clumps.

Qingyu, counting the last time I was in the Northwest, I've won six battles in a row. I have a hunch that it's coming. My first defeat is coming soon. Help."

…

For some reason, seeing Gu Fuzhou complaining about the Xixia's demon commander's superb military skills, about how he wasn't his match, Lin Qingyu did not feel particularly worried. This was merely Gu Fuzhou's lips making mischief. Though he obviously hadn't written anything good, it somehow inspired confidence in Gu Fuzhou. This man was always like this; handling everything to the utmost amidst his unenthusiastic reluctance.

The peace of mind that Gu Fuzhou gave him had never been one through words. This time…will probably be the same.

No, it must be the same.

Lin Qingyu invited in the New Year in a very simple manner. Yuan Yin, as in previous years, hung red silk lanterns in the General's Mansion, pasting paper cuttings on the windows. He also had the kitchen prepare a sumptuous New

Year's Eve dinner. But Lin Qingyu cared nothing for these and he returned to his room to rest after just a couple of bites.

Inside the room was the big bed that Gu Fuzhou had meticulously selected. In order to cause the least amount of inconvenience, Gu Fuzhou had specially asked the carpenter to create a matching wooden table. Every night, a tea set would be place atop the table so that if one were to wake up thirsty in the middle of the night, simply leaning over would bring you within reach of something to drink.

Lin Qingyu was lying on the inside of the bed. His limbs felt slightly cold. No matter how thick the quilt was, his body simply wouldn't warm up.

After the fourth watch, Lin Qingyu gave up on trying to sleep. He got out of bed, put on a fox fur robe, took a lit candle and walked to the table. He picked

up a brush and wrote down what was in his heart: Mandarin ducks cold as frost, the emerald quilt cool as ice.

First, I wish my husband a thousand years old; second, I wish for my continued health; third, may we be as swallows upon the beams, seeing each other year after year… In the end, these were but fine wishes.

After writing, Lin Qingyu turned absent-minded. He raised his eyes and looked towards the northwestern horizon.

The candle burned out as he sat alone, greeting the dawn.

On the third day of the New Year, people begun visiting the General's Mansion to pay their New Year's greetings. Unlike last year, aside from the numerous military officials, there were also many civil officials who came calling. After the new emperor ascended the throne, all the elites in the capital knew that aside from General Gu, the General's wife was also not one to look down upon. It was said that this fifth-rank medical officer Imperial Physician Lin, if one were to replace "Imperial Physician" with "Taifu", then his name would reflect reality.

Most requests for visitations, Lin Qingyu outright rejected. However, there were some people he could not not see. For example, Gu Fuzhou's right-hand man in the army, Wu Zhan.

The impudent remarks he had made regarding General Gu still weighed on Wu Zhan's mind. During this New Year's visit, he intended to make a formal

apology and the gifts he brought occupied half the courtyard. “I hope that the Madam would not reject the kindly regards of the General’s brothers.”

“Not at all.” Lin Qingyu remained polite, “General Wu, take a seat. Hua Lu, please serve the tea.”

Wu Zhan drank tea, all the while still fidgeting. He and Gu Fuzhou were both warriors and they were used to being informal. If they wanted to apologize, they did so in an open, natural manner. But now sitting in front of Lin Qingyu, being the target of that pair of calm and tranquil eyes, the words of apology he had prepared became too embarrassing to say.

Lin Qingyu said, “General Wu seems to have something he wishes to say.”

Wu Zhan threw caution to the wind. “Alright then. Before the General went to war, I cursed at him, carried away by the heat of the moment. Later on, I found

out that I had misunderstood the General. This guilt has weighed on my heart…"

Lin Qingyu asked, "Have you told the General about this?"

"I have and the General has generously agreed not to debase himself to my level."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Since that is the case, then I shall do the same."

Wu Zhan breathed a sigh of relief and said with a grin, "Do not worry, Madam. Next time I will make sure to have a tight hold on my violent temper. If I ever speak rudely of the General again, I will take myself to perform stable duty and feed the horses for three months. "

Lin Qingyu asked, "General Wu said just now that you cursed at the General in the 'heat of the moment'. Might I know what brought on this 'heat of the moment'?"

Wu Zhan was feeling guilty. "Truth be told, it might not be so much 'heat of the moment'. At first I was angry at seeing the General remain indifferent despite the dire situation in the Northwest. And it was not only me; Wu Guogong too felt that this was a matter only the General could handle. However, we also thought that perhaps the General had his reasons for doing things as he did.

And so, we simply spoke of these matters in private. We did not expect to be overheard by Prime Minister Cui."

Prime Minister Cui, Cui Lian. Currently in his fifties, he was the late emperor's right hand man. When Xiao Cheng was crown prince supervising the country, he too placed a lot of trust in this minister. It could be said that he enjoyed high prestige in the court. Lin Qingyu had not had any intention of moving against this person.

Lin Qingyu asked, "What did Prime Minister Cui say to make you so angry?"

"Prime Minister Cui said that we showed no understanding for the General. That the General has fought for the Dayu for more than a decade and now that he is married to a great beauty, it is but pardonable that he indulge in the land of warmth and tenderness. He said that Xixia's commander was crafty and cunning. The General is but a mortal. How could he compete with a 'demon'? It is only normal that he cower. He told us not to be so harsh on him."

Lin Qingyu found something wrong. "So Prime Minister Cui was speaking for the general?"

"Ye-yes." Thinking back on it now, Wu Zhan too felt that something wasn't quite right. "Prime Minister Cui also said that the ease and comfort that the General enjoyed in the capital was what he deserved for fighting for so many years. His every word was for the benefit of the General, but hearing him, we

simply grew furious. Then, I couldn't hold back and rushed to the barracks… Sigh, my mind is a mess."

Lin Qingyu was lost in thought. Did Prime Minister Cui make this move on his own or had he been ordered by someone else? He had always thought that this old minister was quite harmless, well content with his lot. But now it seems… Lin Qingyu was feeling the urge to do something bad by himself again.

"Madam, just why did the General not immediately step forward to go the Northwest?" Wu Zhan couldn't help but ask, "Is it really because he was reluctant to part with his glory and wealth in the capital? I don't believe it!"

Lin Qingyu glanced at Wu Zhan and said, "Because he felt it was his responsibility not only to the three hundred thousand troops of the Zhengxi

Army but also to the entire populace that he not step onto the battlefield, that he involve himself less in the Northwest's affairs."

Wu Zhan was shocked and said, "Why would he think that? The General is our Dayu's god of war. The soldiers trust him to the utmost!"

"And so, in the end, he went. For the sake of your trust." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Even had you not pressured him, he would have still gone."

In the end, Jiang Gongzi was different from him. In his bones, he was still a warm and gentle young man.

After seeing Wu Zhan off, Lin Qingyu ordered Hua Lu to prepare a generous gift and he asked Yuan Yin to get the carriage ready. Since Prime Minister Cui had so generously spoken for his husband, it was only proper that he go and thank him.

The prime minister's mansion received the fifth-grade imperial physician's visiting card. The entire mansion tensed as though faced with a formidable foe. It was as though they had received a decree from the Empress Dowager herself. Cui Lian personally welcomed Lin Qingyu into the main hall where

guests were entertained and the tea they served was top-notch. His treatment was neither warm nor cold, it was simply the very height of politeness.

“I really did not expect that Imperial Physician Lin would come visit my humble mansion to pay his New Year’s greetings.” Cui Lian said, “I did not know that this minister has caught Imperial Physician Lin’s notice.”

Lin Qingyu said, “To tell you the truth, Prime Minister Cui, I originally had no intention of visiting. However, I heard Prime Minister Cui spoke for the benefit of the General before he set off on the expedition. And thus I have come to offer my thanks.”

There was no change in Cui Lian’s expression but the hand holding his tea cup momentarily froze. “The General has worked and performed invaluable service to our country. He has already suffered injury for our Dayu. This minister couldn’t bear to see the General be forced onto the battlefield once again.”

Lin Qingyu said unhurriedly, “But I clearly remember that Prime Minister Cui earlier expressed in his letter to the Emperor that there is no better candidate that the General to take command of the Northwest. What could possibly have made Prime Minister Cui change his mind so drastically?”

Cui Lian was momentarily struck speechless. However, he reacted very quickly and said calmly, “A letter to His Majesty? This minister has not sent

any letter to the Emperor regarding the command of the Northwest. Did Imperial Physician Lin remember it wrong?"

"So, I see." Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. "It's possible I may have remembered it wrong."

Such beauty should be a balm to eyes and mind but Cui Lian was apprehensive. He truly had sent this letter but the only one who saw it was His Majesty. What Lin Qingyu said; did he really know something? Or was he trying to make him slip?

Not giving Cui Lian time to think too much, Lin Qingyu got up and bid him goodbye. Before leaving, Lin Qingyu said, "Prime Minister Cui, you are a senior minister of two dynasties, the pillar of the country. I urge the Prime Minister to think matters over thrice before taking any action. Please don't do anything stupid."

After Lin Qingyu left, Cui Lian was still uneasy. He thought it over and over, but in the end, he still decided to head to the palace though it was already the hour for resting. The emperor had already gone to sleep and the one who went to meet him was Eunuch Xi. The first time he had faced His Majesty alone, the

emperor had said, Xi Rong's intentions are Zhen's intentions. Aiqing may deal with him as aiqing would to Zhen."

Cui Lian gave Xi Rong a detailed account of what had happened today. "Eunuch Xi, my letter to the Emperor recommending General Gu as commander…"

"Do not worry, Lord Prime Minister, it was burnt after His Majesty read it. It was impossible for Imperial Physician Lin to have read it."

Fear still lingered in Cui Lian's heart, "Then he was really trying to make me slip. How insidious and cunning. He truly is hard to guard against!"

The corner of Xi Rong's lips pulled up. "But when the Lord Prime Minister came visiting the Emperor so late at night, did this not already imply to Imperial Physician Lin that you conceal guilt in your heart?"

Cui Lian had a sudden realization, and was immediately vexed. "I didn't even think of that!"

"There is no need for the Lord Prime Minister to blame himself." Xi Rong said, feeling greatly interest, "Imperial Physician Lin has already seen it clearly

earlier on. This visit by the Lord Prime Minister simply gave him evidence. Even without this evidence, he has already confirmed the situation."

"You mean, he already knew all about it?"

Xi Rong narrowed his eyes. "Today, he came calling you to account. In the future, it will be my turn."

At this time, a little eunuch came looking for Xi Rong. "Eunuch Xi, the emperor is awake and is looking for you."

"I have troubled the Lord Prime Minister over this matter. Please leave the rest to me." After saying so, Xi Rong hurriedly headed to the emperor's palace.

On the day of Lantern Festival, Lin Qingyu once again received a letter from Gu Fuzhou. "Seven consecutive victories, Baobei. Wu Youyuan has made great contributions. As expected of the man who will crush the Xixia. However, he seems to be getting complacent; he keeps feeling he can take them all on

himself. But it's not a big problem, I'll make sure to reign him in a little — Happy Anniversary."

Gu Fuzhou had written this last letter during the New Year. It happened to reach Lin Qingyu's hands on the day they confessed their feelings for each other.

Lin Qingyu gave a shallow smile. He put away the latter, putting it together with the ring that Gu Fuzhou gave him.

In the afternoon, a servant from Ci'an Palace came to the mansion to deliver a message. The Empress Dowager was inviting Lin Qingyu to the palace to celebrate the Lantern Festival. They were to climb the tower after sunset to admire the lights.

The author has something to say:

Mini theater:

Classmate Jiang went shopping with the beautiful wife who had been delivered to his door.

On the subway, the great beauty, who had just learned to use a mobile phone, was chatting on WeChat with the stranger who helped him.

Stranger: What? He's even making you take the subway! I f*cking can't stand this! Couldn't he have taken a taxi! How dare he make such a great beauty take

the subway! Damn this attractive but worthless high-schooler!

After seeing it, Classmate Jiang thought for a while and said to the beautiful wife: Er… maybe you should get a driver's license first?

Chapter 91

The Lantern Festival started in the evening. Lin Qingyu wanted to bring up Cui Lian's matter with the Empress Dowager and thus, went to the palace early.

Nowadays, there was no shortage of filial piety from the emperor and Ci'an Palace was given the best of the best. Knowing that the Empress Dowager liked chrysanthemums, the emperor had especially ordered dozens of lanterns in the style of chrysanthemums to be placed in Ci'an Palace's courtyard. The sky was only beginning to darken and the lanterns created a magnificent sight, it looked like a spring blooming amidst the snow.

Lai Fu looked at the sea of flowers and said with a smile, "Empress Dowager, the emperor regards you with such thoughtfulness."

The Empress Dowager was completely disinterested. "Although I am the emperor's imperial mother, there has been no motherly affection between us for the past two decades. He is merely making a show of all this. Besides, given the emperor's temperament, how could he possibly come up with tricks like these? Most likely, it was that eunuch who once again gave him the idea."

When Lin Qingyu arrived at Ci'an Palace, the palace kitchens had just cooked a pot of sticky rice dumplings. The Empress Dowager was just having a taste of it with Little King Huai when Lai Fu came it to report Lin Qingyu's arrival.

Treating Lin Qingyu as one of her own, she immediately told Lai Fu to usher him in.

Lin Qingyu entered the inner hall and saw the Empress Dowager and Xiao Li sitting at the table. It was apparent that Xiao Li had been meticulously dressed. He was wearing a royal robe embroidered with a five-clawed dragon, a jade ornament hung around his slender waist. The young man's features were of exquisite elegance; it could be said that he possessed unparalleled good looks, that his attractiveness came second to none. However, this young man who was supposed to be of that cool breeze and bright moon, remained dull and sluggish, no trace of vitality could be found on his body.

Lin Qingyu saluted the two of them, "Greeting to Her Highness the Empress Dowager and His Highness the prince."

The Empress Dowager said amiably. "Qingyu, you're here. Come sit down. Give Imperial Physician Lin a plate of dumplings."

Lin Qingyu was not used to being called him by his name by people apart from his family and husband. This year, he and the Empress Dowager had found themselves on the same boat and they have worked together to handle several matters that must be kept secret from outsiders. It could be said that the glory of one was the glory of both and that the loss of one was the loss of both. Whether the Empress Dowager truly regarded him well or whether this was all

hypocrisy, it mattered not. She treated him better than even when he was Lu Wancheng's wife.

Lin Qingyu declined, "This official has already eaten before leaving the house. I would not wish to disturb the Empress Dowager and the prince."

The Empress Dowager said, "Then you can just eat again. How can a man such as yourself not be able to even finish a bowl dumplings? Ci'an Palace has only me and Li'er and it's always a little lonely. In any case, you were once my sister's daughter-in-law, you're Li'er's cousin. You could say that we're family. There are no outsiders in Ci'an Palace, there's no need for you to be polite."

Being that the Empress Dowager had gone so far as to say all this, Lin Qingyu then decided to sit down as she had bidden him to do. The dumplings in front of him were steaming hot and Lin Qingyu tasted a piece. The outside layer was sweet, soft and sticky; the sesame filling though was a little too cloyingly sweet for him.

The Empress Dowager was attending to Xiao Li and she herself couldn't spare a thought about eating. If Xiao Li was to left to eat by himself, he would grab it with his hands and stuff it into his mouth. In Ci'an Palace, there was a momo

who was tasked specially with feeding Xiao Li; the Empress Dowager too often fed him herself.

As soon as the dumpling was brought to his lips, Xiao Li opened his mouth and took it in. He then chewed it slowly. Though mentally deficient, he did not at all appear clumsy or awkward when eating.

Seeing Xiao Li eat one dumpling after another, the momo who looked after Xiao Li smiled and said, “Our little prince sure does like to eat dumplings. Look at how happy he is.”

Listening to the momo’s tone, one would think she was talking about a baby under a year old. How could Xiao Li be happy? His face clearly did not show

any sort of expression. These kind of words were said only to coax the Empress Dowager.

The Empress Dowager loved her son like life and sure enough, she was coaxed by the momo's words. She asked softly, "Does Li'er like to eat sticky rice dumplings?"

Xiao Li opened his lips slightly, staring at the spoon in the Empress Dowager's hand.

"Call me mother and I'll feed you, okay? Li'er, say 'mo-ther', 'mo-ther'." The Empress Dowager said patiently, "Li'er, here, listen. 'Mo—-ther'."

Xiao Li seemed to be in another world, unable to hear the Empress Dowager's voice or respond to her words.

Lin Qingyu said, "Although dumplings are good for you, one mustn't eat too much of it."

The Empress Dowager dropped her hand in frustration, "Then, forget it. Take all these away."

Though unable to eat any more dumplings, Xiao Li didn't cry or make a fuss. He slowly lowered his head and once again immersed himself in his own world.

The Empress Dowager sighed softly and couldn't hide her disappointment.

“Li’er will be turning sixteen this year. But hs mind is still like that of a three of four year old. He doesn’t know how to speak like other children…I don’t even know whether I will ever hear Li’er call me ‘mother’ in this lifetime.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Is His Highness able to speak?” It seemed he had never heard Xiao Li’s voice before.

“The National Teacher said that Li’er has all five senses. He shows no reaction because his soul is not in his body.” The Empress Dowager smiled bitterly, “He also said that most people with condition have a bewitching appearance. It is fortunate that Li’er is of the Imperial family. I hate to think what injustices he would have suffered were he a no name commoner with such a face.”

Lin Qingyu said, “The little prince is indeed very handsome.”

The Empress Dowager glanced at him and said, “Not quite up to par with you though.”

“The little prince is young and has yet to mature.”

“No matter how good his appearance is, what’s the use? I would have rather he look plain.”

The palace maid took away the dumplings and served fruit to cleanse the palate and aid in digestion. Lin Qingyu brought up Cui Lian and asked, “Has

the Empress Dowager seen Cui Xiang's recommendation regarding command of the Northwest?"

The Empress Dowager thought back carefully and said, "I haven't. As far as I can recall, whenever Prime Minister Cui attended court, his attitude towards this matter was ambiguous, his words vague. It was difficult for anyone to get a good grasp on his stand."

Lin Qingyu said, "I have read every letter regarding the Northwest but I have not seen one from Prime Minister Cui. It seems that someone deliberately hid it in order to use Prime Minister Cui to fuel the flames among the military officials. "

Lin Qingyu and the Empress Dowager were well aware of who this person was.

"In the end, he is still unreconciled with being controlled." The Empress Dowager took off her finger guards and started peeling the citrus with her own hands. "There is one thing that I have never quite understood."

"I ask Her Highness to speak freely."

"It seems you knew early on that he's the restless type. Why'd you give him a chance?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Among the three sons of the late emperor, apart from the deposed crown prince, only the current emperor remained – I am sorry, if we

were to support the little prince at that time, not to mention it is unlikely the civil and military officials would have believe the late emperor's edict, if the Xixia learned that the future emperor is mentally deficient, what sort of impression would it have made? And thus, our only choice was His Majesty. However, His Majesty had no ambition towards the throne. I needed Xi Rong to make his political achievements for him so that he could be pushed onto the throne without disturbing the situation in the imperial court."

"I understand." The Empress Dowager gently wiped the corner of Xiao Li's mouth with a handkerchief. "You have done a good job. The Emperor has successfully ascended the throne. In the future, His Majesty will have you and I to help him look after the country. There's no need for Xi Rong to continue living now is there?"

Lin Qingyu smiled, "What the Empress Dowager said is very true. But Xi Rong is not someone to be trifled with. He has already drawn Prime Minister Cui to his side and he is highly valued by the Emperor. By rashly moving against him, we might be beating the grass and startling the snake."

The Empress Dowager snorted coldly, "A thing without roots. If I startle him, then what of it?"

In the Empress Dowager's eyes, Xi Rong was nothing more than someone who's a little clever. Disposing of him wouldn't make any waves. She didn't know that Xi Rong and Xiao Jie had been mutually dependent on each other

for many years. Killing Xi Rong wasn't difficult. But if they were to lose Xiao Jie over this, who they would sit on the throne would become a problem.

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes to look at Xiao Li. His eyes darkened a little.

It was true that Xiao Li would easier to control than anyone else but in the end, he was a dullard, after all. Right now the Northwest was in turmoil. If he and the Empress Dowager supported another fool to ascend to the throne, he was afraid it would be difficult to reassure the army and the populace.

At least, he had to wait for Gu Fuzhou to come back.

"Empress Dowager," Lai Fu stepped forward and said, "All the princesses of His former Highness have come to the Ci'an Palace to pay their respects."

"I shall go and see them." The Empress Dowager said, "Xiu Jiao, you can feed the prince some more fruit."

The momo named Xiu Jiao peeled another tangerine and fed it to Xiao Li. Xiao Li pursed his lips. It seemed he had no interest in citrus. Xiu Jiao momo coaxed softly, "Your Highness, please have another one."

Apart from his family and Gu Fuzhou, Lin Qingyu has always been cold and unapproachable, keeping others at a distance. But for some reason, though he

had only met Xiao Li a few times, he felt that this dullard prince was amiable, giving off an indescribable sense of familiarity.

Lin Qingyu said, “Allow me to try.”

After a moment’s hesitation, Xiu Jiao stepped back and gave Lin Qingyu her spot beside Xiao Li.

Lin Qingyu picked up a tangerine segment and said, “Little Prince, open your mouth.”

Xiao Li stared at him for a while and then opened his mouth obediently. He let him put the tangerine into his mouth, a small bulge forming on his cheek.

“Is it sweet?”

Lin Qingyu had just asked casually. Unexpectedly, Xiao Li revealed a reaction.

— He smiled.

Xiao Li’s countenance was excellent and when he shows a smile, the dullness in his eyes faded and they shone like stars. They could fascinate someone who had yet to see the world to lose their souls in them. Something usually not seen rose up below the boy’s eyes. Gu Fuzhou had told him about this thing, the so-called “plump lower eyelids”. Jiang Gongzi had said that in his original body, he

too had this when he smiled. Unfortunately, neither Lu Wancheng nor Gu Fuzhou had this.

Having this layer under the eyes when he smiled… it really does look good.

Xiao Li only smiled for a very short moment and his lifeless expression soon returned. It was as though that smile was an illusion seen by onlookers through dazzled eyes.

Xiu Jiao was stunned and it took a long while for her to react. She hurriedly ran to tell the Empress Dowager. “Empress Dowager, His Highness smiled!”

When the Empress Dowager heard this, she lost all thought of receiving the princesses. She immediately stood up, “Is this true?”

“It’s true! This servant saw it very clearly and Imperial Physician Lin saw it too.”

The Empress Dowager immediately grew excited. “Quickly, go and call the National Teacher!”

The author has something to say: Sit down and sit down. It’s not time for the third transmigration yet! Some remaining fragment of his soul was probably influenced by its master and felt like smiling when it saw the great beauty.

Chapter 92

Xu Junyuan rushed to the palace, thinking that something earth-shattering must have happened. Unexpectedly, the entire Ci'an Palace was in a flurry just

because Little King Huai smiled at the beautiful imperial physician who fed him oranges.

Xu Junyuan opened Xiao Li's eyelids, looked at it repeatedly and then gave Lin Qingyu a meaningful look.

The Empress Dowager urged, "National Teacher, Li'er has grown and except for crying when he was just born, he has shown no expression since. Now with this smile, does it mean that his missing soul illness is getting better?"

Xu Junyuan murmured, "Not necessarily."

Not necessarily meant that it was possible. The empress dowager couldn't restrain her eyes from turning red and she said, voice trembling, "So, there is still hope for Li'er's illness to be cured?"

"Although the prince's soul has left his body, wisps of his soul still remain to ensure that the body continues living. As a remnant of the soul, it is normal for it cry and smile. This does not explain anything."

The empress dowager would not give up and said, "But, Li'er has never smiled before. Why would he smile all of sudden?"

Xu Junyuan asked Xiu Jiao momo, "You said just now that His Highness smiled at Imperial Physician Lin?"

Xiu Jiao momo nodded nonstop. "Imperial Physician Lin fed His Highness a

piece of orange and His Highness smiled."

"That must be it." Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "The prince can see and he saw the beauty feeding him and then he was happy. He smiled."

Xiu Jiao momo said, "But the prince never smiled even when he saw other beauties."

"That's probably because the other beauties weren't beautiful enough."

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "I am already a married man. I am someone's wife. For the National Teacher to refer to me only as a beauty makes light of my identity."

Xu Junyuan made a bow, and said, "I was negligent and I apologize to the General's wife."

Greater hope brings greater disappointment. The empress dowager caressed Xiao Li's face. Choked up, she said, "Li'er, you should also smile at your mother…"

The empress dowager treated him with such sincerity but Xiao Li didn't even want to look at her. The boy had his long, distinct lashes hanging down. He was quietly playing with his fingers.

Even Xu Junyuan couldn't help but be moved by this situation. He said, attempting to bring comfort, "Days and months, years upon years, the world is

ever-changing. The prince's soul may yet return to his body in the future. Since the prince shows a liking for the General's wife, let the Madam come to Ci'an Palace often to accompany the prince. The future is unpredictable and I hope the Empress Dowager can rest at ease. Taking care of your phoenix body is most important."

When all was said and done, the Empress Dowager was someone who had weathered countless storms. Her qualities had been tempered by palace politics for many years and only her son and her nephew could make her lose her composure. She made up her mind, wiped away the tears from her eyes and said, "I have troubled the National Teacher to make this visit." She looked at the sky outside the window, "It's less than an hour before sunset. Now that you're here, why not stay for the night in the palace. Accompany His Majesty and aijia to climb the tower and see the lanterns."

Xu Junyuan responded with a smile, "This minister gladly obeys."

Once night fell, Xiao Jie, the Empress Dowager and many of the imperial clan climbed up the tower together. The Empress Dowager was at the head of the column, supported by Xiao Jie. Seeing Xiao Jie's rather unnatural expression and awkward movements, one could easily tell whether his display of filial piety was sincere or not. Standing behind them were several old kings and princesses, as well as Xiao Li led by Xiu Jiao momo. Lin Qingyu and Xu

Junyuan stood at the end. Amongst the many people here, only the two of them were not related to the emperor.

The imperial palace tower was the highest in the capital and was thus the most suitable place for viewing the lanterns. Looking from that vantage point, you had a panoramic view of the magnificent scenery of the capital.

Trees lit as though afire and flowers shining like silver. Parade floats travelled the streets and crowds thronged throughout. It was much like it was the year before.

The moon and the lanterns remained the same but the person from the year past was nowhere to be seen. Appreciating the lanterns at the very best spot, oh but who to tell it to?

Xiu Jiao momo's voice came from not far away, "My lord, look. That lantern is made in the shape of a rabbit…"

A few steps away from Lin Qingyu, a young man with but a remnant of his soul was standing high above the city, his eyes reflecting the same bright lights reflected in Lin Qingyu's.

The Empress Dowager was in no mood to admire the lanterns and after watching it for an hour, she said, "Aijia is exhausted. I shall be going ahead

with Li'er back to the palace to rest. It is so rare for the whole family to get together. Your Majesty, you should stay and chat with your noble uncles."

Xiao Jie replied in assent. Lin Qingyu took the opportunity to retire as well. The empress dowager said, "That's fine, let Imperial Physician Lin escort aijia back to Ci'an Palace." Saying so, she raised her hand.

Lin Qingyu paused, stepped forward, and asked the empress dowager to put her hand on his arm. The two were about to head down when Xi Rong suddenly stood up. He lifted his robes and knelt down, saying loudly, "This

servant, Sili supervisor, Xi Rong, am here to plead for forgiveness from the Empress Dowager and Imperial Physician Lin."

With his loud delivery, all the nobles' attention was drawn to them.

Lin Qingyu and the empress dowager looked at each other. The empress dowager said sharply, "What nonsense are you doing? Are you deliberately spoiling the enjoyment of His Majesty and the assembled nobility?"

"No, Empress Dowager," Xiao Jie said nervously, "A'Rong wishes to sincerely apologize and I ask that you listen to him first."

The emperor himself having spoken, naturally, the empress dowager couldn't humiliate him in front of the clan. "It seems that the Emperor knew of your crime in advance. Well, let's hear it."

Xi Rong kowtowed and said, "On that day, Yong Liang fell, and the Northwest was in turmoil. No one in court save for General Gu was qualified to serve as commander of the Zhengxi army. However, General Gu refused to take command. It was this servant who offered advice to the Emperor and Prime Minister Cui to deliberately anger General Wu and fuel General Gu's fighting spirit, make him regain his glory, show the vigor that trod the Xixia underfoot and save the people of Yong Liang from disaster. For the sake of the Northwest

and for the Dayu, I had no choice but to make such an unwise move. This servant is willing to accept punishment."

Before the Empress Dowager could say anything, Xiao Jie said again, "Imperial mother, although A'Rong did something wrong, he did so with the Northwest in mind. The Xixia threatened to massacre the city if we didn't send General Gu. A'Rong really only did it because there was no other way…"

One old king said, "I too have heard something of what had happened that day. General Gu was the commander personally appointed by the late emperor. Despite turmoil in the Northwest, he was standing back unconcerned and letting matters rest. In my opinion, His Majesty should have issued a decree ordering him to go. Why so much concern on his wishes? The Emperor has already spared General Gu face by going about things this way."

Another king agreed, "Third brother is right. After all, it is all for the sake of the Dayu. Even if the eunuch is guilty, the merits and demerits of this matter have balanced each other."

Xi Rong looked at Lin Qingyu from out of the corner of his eye. The beautiful Imperial Physician was also looking at him quietly, his expression seemed calm but he knew that Lin Qingyu… wanted his life.

The empress dowager's chest rose and fell slightly. She tried her best to hide her anger and said with a sneer, "Since the two kings have pleaded for you,

aijia has no choice but to deal with you leniently — Drag him away, give him thirty lashes."

Xiao Jie's eyes widened. "Th-thirty?"

"Why?" the empress dowager said coolly, "Does the emperor think it is too much?"

Xi Rong called "Your Majesty" in a low voice and Xiao Jie pursed his lips tightly, saying nothing more. Anyone though could see that he was dying of distress.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help thinking, if Xi Rong died in front of him, what kind of funny expression would Xiao Jie have?

He kind of wanted to see it.

Back in Ci'an Palace, the empress dowager asked Xiu Jiao momo to take Xiao Li back to his room to rest and then dismissed everyone. She said angrily, "That was a good trick. The thief crying thief first. Aijia has underestimated

that eunuch. I never expected the emperor to actually protect him to that extent!"

Lin Qingyu said, "Unfortunately, the time has not yet come to touch Xi Rong."

"Why?"

Lin Qingyu explained, "Before the General regains the Northwest, there must be no changes within the capital. We have to at least wait until the General regains Yong Liang and stabilizes the situation in the Northwest before we can make a move."

Since he stayed behind in the capital, he had to ensure that the Xixia did not have any chance to disturb the morale of the army, so that the soldiers could fight on the battlefield without any worries.

"Aijia does not understand." The empress dowager said coldly, "Granted, Xi Rong is a somewhat clever eunuch but how can killing him cause changes in the capital? Is it possible that the emperor would risk his position on the throne for the sake of matters between me and him?"

Lin Qingyu said, "If I were to say that Xi Rong is to the emperor what the little prince is to you, will you understand?"

The empress dowager was stunned. Of course she understood that Xiao Li was her life. In order to be reunited with Xiao Li, she had even betrayed her emperor and her husband. If anyone were to kill Xiao Li, she would have the

murderer and his entire clan buried alive with him. And then… she would go below to the Nine Springs to accompany Li'er.

"But, how could that be? Even if the two had a close childhood friendship, it should not result in something like this."

Lin Qingyu told the empress dowager about Xi Rong's life experience. After hearing this, the empress dowager's expression became more severe and she resolutely said, "If he really is the emperor's half-brother, then all the more reason we cannot let him remain."

"At this moment, the war in the Northwest should come first in everything." Lin Qingyu still said the same thing, "We will talk about the rest once Yong Liang has been recovered."

The empress dowager asked, "Are you not afraid that he will move against us first?"

Lin Qingyu laughed, "He won't. He wouldn't dare."

If something were to happen to him in the capital, it might not be Xixia the 300,000 soldiers under Gu Fuzhou's command would kill. Xi Rong was also waiting. Once Gu Fuzhou pacifies the Northwest for him, he will look for an opportunity, hiding his strength and biding his time, aiming to take back

military power. With Xi Rong's caution and prudence, he considers thrice each step he makes. He will not touch Lin Qingyu until he has absolute assurance.

Lin Qingyu stayed in the palace until late at night. By the time he left the palace, the lanterns had been extinguished and the crowds were gone. Only the

bright moon was left in the sky; the same bright moon shining thousands of miles away in the Northwest.

Northwest, Guizhou Governor's Mansion.

Gu Fuzhou stretched out his hand and asked Hu Ji to examine his pulse. Seeing the seriousness on Hu Ji's face, he couldn't help sighing, "Is there no cure for my disease?"

Hu Ji said, embarrassed, "When people reach middle age, they often suffer from hair loss, especially men. The general's hair loss is not a serious matter. I lose more than you. You really worry too much."

"No, I really feel like I've lost half the hair on my head though." Gu Fuzhou said in a deep voice, "Imperial Physician Hu, you must find a way to cure me. If my hair keeps falling at this rate, I'll return to see Qingyu with a bald head."

Hu Ji had no choice but to say, "You should rest more and think less. You might see some improvement."

Gu Fuzhou laughed loudly, "How is that possible in the current situation?"

The two were talking when there was a sound of footsteps outside. There were two visitors, one was Zhengxi Army vanguard Wu Youyuan, and the other was Shen Huaishi, the former shadow guard of the Tianji Camp.

Wu Youyuan and Shen Huaishi were both skilled in martial arts. One was good

at fighting head-on and the other was well versed in the ways of an assassin. After Wu Youyuan learned that Shen Huaishi used to be a shadow guard from the Tianji Camp, he often pestered Shen Huaishi to spar with him in his spare time. After a month, he hasn't won once.

"General, we're back."

Hearing Wu Youyuan's voice, Gu Fuzhou didn't even bother raising his head. He asked, "Let me guess, you lost ten games in a row?"

Wu Youyuan remained unreconciled. "How much older is Shen Dage than I am? Wait for me to grow up a few more years. I will definitely beat him."

Shen Huaizhi smiled helplessly, and said, "General, I have your letter from home."

Gu Fuzhou stood up at once. "Give it to me." In front of the three of them, he opened the letter and began to read it carefully.

Hu Ji said, "Looking at the General's expression, Imperial Physician Lin must be doing fine in the capital."

"Everything remains the same in the Imperial Palace. He is trying to solve the problem of insufficient provisions and wages… It's all business." Gu Fuzhou

turned a page and the corner of his lips rose up, “Oh, the little Gu is growing very well. It’s already given birth to the second nest.”

Wu Youyuan asked curiously, “Little Gu? What is that?”

Gu Fuzhou said solemnly, “They are the second young lady and the third young master of the General’s Mansion.”

Wu Youyuan was dumbfounded, “When did the General and Imperial Physician Lin have a baby?”

Hu Ji smiled and said, “I think the general is talking about the Gu’s being raised by Doctor Lin.”

Wu Youyuan laughed out loud and Shen Huaishi couldn’t help laughing as well. Wu Youyuan asked, “What about the eldest son of the General’s Mansion?”

“Not the eldest son, but the eldest daughter.” Gu Fuzhou said, “She was trampled to death by a servant.”

They looked at each other, at a loss. Not knowing what expression to put on their faces, they said, “General, we are sorry for your loss.”

“Speaking of which, today is the Lantern Festival.” Hu Ji recalled, “During the year, it’s only during the Lantern Festival that the curfew is lifted in the capital.

It's also the busiest day of the year."

Hearing what Hu Ji said, Gu Fuzhou's memory of that festive night in the capital emerged in his mind: the city full of lanterns, the Jinshui River as bright as a galaxy of stars, a great beauty lovely enough to cause the face of a city and …— a lantern in the shape of a rabbit.

Gu Fuzhou smiled to himself. He patted Wu Youyuan on the shoulder and said, "Brothers, you've done a good job. Finish your sparring early and go turn in."

It took more than half a year but Gu Fuzhou led the soldiers to recover several cities adjacent to Yong Liang.

In the autumn of the second year of Chuxi, the Dayu's army was ready for action, setting their sights on the last city – Yong Liang.

The author has something to say: No matter how beautiful San Zhuang may be, you must still cherish Er Zhuang who has not long to live. This is the last series of events of the year. (dog head)

Chapter 93

The scenery of the Northwest frontier fortress was quite different from that of the capital city. The beginning of winter was just around the corner and the chill wind was already cutting cold like a knife and the sky was heavy with frost. The mountains bore sand-like snow, a solitary plaintive cry of a wild goose rang in the city.

Last winter, the Xixia took Yong Liang from the Dayu. They humiliated and killed the general and threatened to massacre the city. Today, one year later, the scenery at the frontier remained the same but the people within and without the city have already switched positions, from offense to defense, from defense to offense. Dayu's army had camped outside the city a month ago. They have been biding their time for a month, conserving their strength and storing up energy, all for the final battle.

The days of readying will always be boring compared to times of siege. After days and days of resting and resting, a certain hot-blooded boy couldn't bear it anymore.

"General, we have been consolidating our troops for a whole month." This was Wu Youyuan's third call for battle within ten days. "Before this, our army has consecutively captured the towns of Guang Yang, Lan Gu and Zhuo Xian. The troops have had a huge boost in morale. This is the time when we should be

pressing on. We should take Yong Liang directly. If there is any further delay, the soldiers will inevitably slack off and our provisions will dwindle."

Gu Fuzhou folded his arms and looked at the northwest terrain on the sand table, saying nothing.

"I must disagree with the general. The art of war says, 'First is to attack their plans, second is to attack their ties, next is to attack their troops, last is to attack their city. Laying siege to the city should be a last resort.' Yong Liang is a veritable fortress in the Northwest. It has always been a place of strategic importance. The city's defenses are strong. It is easy to defend and difficult to attack. How can it compare to a bunch of small towns like Guang Yang and Lan Gu." The speaker was Shi Pei, an old veteran in the Northwest Army. All the military officials respected this general of the fourth rank.

Gu Fuzhou glanced at Shi Pei. This man was known to love his soldiers like his own sons. Although he had been in battle for many years, he still mourned the loss of every soldier. For Shi Pei, reducing the casualties of their army was the top priority. He would rather a graceless victory if it meant protecting the

soldiers under his command. This was a noble quality and Gu Fuzhou admired him very much.

Wu Youyuan retorted, “Laying siege is difficult. But would laying siege to it later be any less difficult than laying siege to it now? Since this is all but a matter of time, why not settle it quickly?”

Gu Fuzhou rubbed the center of his eyebrows, and said, “Youyuan, being hot-blooded is a good thing. But if your blood runs too hot, mosquitoes will burn their mouths when they drinking your blood.”

Gu Fuzhou has been staying in the Northwest for a year. He didn’t feel like expending effort to maintain his aloof personality. He now acted however he wished. After Wu Youyuan and others’ initial shock, they gradually accepted General Gu’s new persona. They heard from veterans in the Northwest that General Gu had been poisoned before and his temperament had changed drastically since he recovered his life from the jaws of death. General Gu had acted outrageously at that time. Now, he was much better; at least he didn’t

sleep in all day long. Fortunately, no matter his character, the General would never lead them to defeat.

Wu Youyuan still listened to Gu Fuzhou's words. He said, "Please enlighten me, General."

"You're forgetting how General Zhao lost Yong Liang last winter."

"I have not forgotten." Wu Youyuan said quickly, "Last year, General Zhao was trapped in Yong Liang. The roads were blocked by heavy snow and provisions could not be delivered. In desperation, he opened the gates of the city, he battled, his back against the wall but was no match against Xixia's elite. He lost and died."

Gu Fuzhou said, "You still don't understand?"

Wu Youyuan's intelligence was all focused on the art of war. When Gu Fuzhou said this, he understood. His eyes lit up and said, "The General wants them spend their provisions and force them to open the gates and seek battle like they'd done to General Zhao last year?"

Gu Fuzhou nodded and said, "Without Guang Yang, Lan Gu, Zhuo Xian and the other towns, Yong Liang's provision lines have been cut off. No matter how big it is, it's still utterly surrounded. We have a continuous supply of grain and feed and the Xixia army within the city can only sit, eat and deplete their

stores. By adapting attrition tactics, we are reducing the casualties of our army by at least half."

Shi Pei agreed with Gu Fuzhou's words, "There is nothing better than to use an opponent's own methods to obtain retribution. The Xixia brought into the city all the rations and fodder from the towns like Guang Yang. Adding in Yong Liang's original stockpile, their supplies can last them 50 days at most. It has now been a month. After another half month, the enemy will either starve to death, or open the city's gates to meet the enemy like General Zhao. Their army's morale will be in shreds. By that time our army will have already been gearing up for two months. By that time, are you afraid that we will be unable to take back Yong Liang!"

Wu Youyuan pondered for a while. He too believed that a war of attrition was the best plan. But he still had his doubts. "The Xixia needs rations and fodder. We also need rations and fodder. The key to a war of attrition is that we be able to outlast the Xixia."

Gu Fuzhou turned to Shen Huaishi, "How long can our provisions last?"

Shen Huaizhi said, "Less than ten days. However, Imperial Physician Lin said in his letter that a large amount of provisions from the south departed at the

beginning of the month, travelling by water. It will travel over land once it reaches Gui Province. It should reach camp before long."

Shi Pei excitedly said, "Then we shall definitely have enough!"

"The premise is that the provisions can be delivered smoothly." After weighing the matter, Gu Fuzhou said, "Huaishi, please go back to Gui Province and personally escort the supplies to Yong Liang."

Shen Huaizhi said, "I shall be leaving immediately."

After the coming to an agreement, Gu Fuzhou and Wu Youyuan discussed the appropriate amount of armament needed to attack the city. Seeing this, Shi Pei couldn't help but say, "The general has changed a lot since his return to the Northwest."

"Hm? Why do you say that?"

Shi Pei said, "Two years ago, when the General was in the Northwest, discussing official matters with you was an actual headache. General Zhao

made the decision on everything. How can that compare to now? You attend to every detail and take an interest in everything."

"It can't be helped. I really want to win." Gu Fuzhou said with a quiet chuckle, "I can't die."

The war in the Northwest was coming to its final juncture. Lin Qingyu has not closed his eyes for three days coordinating the transport of provisions from the south to the Northwest. That batch of provisions could support the Northwest Army for at least a month. Now that everything was settled, he could finally feel at ease.

When he walked out of the Ministry of War, Lin Qingyu realized that it had begun to snow at some point. The snow was not heavy, but it made his eyes sore. After being in a trance for a while, he took a step back and bumped into the body of the assistant minister of War.

The assistant minister of War was a man under thirty, he could be regarded as a young promising talent. He was also a distant relative of the Empress Dowager, so he naturally stood on Lin Qingyu's side. During the past few days, Lin Qingyu has been working on the matter of the provisions together with them. Seeing Lin Qingyu's pale face, he thought that Lin Qingyu must be worried about the war in the Northwest. He said, "General Gu has already recovered several towns surrounding Yong Liang, encircling it. It is only a

matter of time before Yong Liang is recovered. Imperial Physician Lin need not worry, this time Dayu will win the battle."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "I hope so."

The assistant minister smiled and said in a gentle manner, "It's snowing and the road is slippery, should I send Imperial Physician Lin out of the palace?"

Lin Qingyu said curtly, "No need."

Although the assistant minister was a little disappointed, he didn't force it. "Then please be careful on the road, Imperial Physician Lin."

Lin Qingyu had only walked a few steps when someone from Ci'an Palace came bearing a message that the Empress Dowager was inviting him to Ci'an Palace for the evening meal. In the past year, he has eaten at Ci'an Palace more times than the "great dutiful son" Xiao Jie. For this reason, there was a lot of gossip in the palace. Some people were even saying that the Empress Dowager has taken in Lin Qingyu as her adopted son and now treated him more affectionately than the emperor.

But Lin Qingyu knew that the reason why the Empress Dowager was so affectionate towards him was because the mentally incomplete Little King

Huai, would smile at him alone. Most of the time the Empress Dowager invited him to Ci'an Palace only to get Xiao Li to smile.

When Lin Qingyu arrived at Ci'an Palace, he saw the emperor's sedan chair parked outside. He asked Lai Fu, "Is the emperor here?"

Lai Fu said, "His Majesty came to pay his respects to the Empress Dowager. He is currently playing in the snow with the little prince in the back garden."

In the back garden, the two royal brothers were squatting in the snow, building a snowman. To be precise, Xiao Jie was the only one making it. Xiao Li couldn't create something so complicated; he could only knead the snow

into small balls and carefully put them away. Xiao Jie kept talking to him though he never got a response.

Xiu Jiao momo, who was standing by one side, saw Lin Qingyu and said with a smile, “My lord, look who’s here.”

Xiao Li raised his head. Seeing Lin Qingyu, he remained somewhat unresponsive, but then, he smiled instinctively.

It was the first time for Xiao Jie to see Xiao Li smiling and he couldn’t help saying, “Sixth Brother, you’re really good-looking…”

Lin Qingyu wanted to kneel down to Xiao Jie. Xiao Jie’s eyes were a little evasive. “There’s no need for Imperial Physician Lin to be so polite.”

Lin Qingyu said, “It’s cold outside. Don’t let His Highness play for too long. The prince’s snow cape is already wet.”

Xiu Jiao momo hurriedly said, “This servant shall take His Highness to change his snow cape.”

Xiu Jiao momo took Xiao Li to leave. Xiao Jie kept casting furtive glances at Lin Qingyu, as if he wanted to say something but didn’t dare to. Lin Qingyu asked, “Does the emperor have something to ask of this humble official?”

Xiao Jie shook his head. Then he nodded. Summoning up his courage, he

asked, “Imperial Physician Lin, will you-will you harm me and A’Rong?”

Lin Qingyu looked at him and said expressionlessly, “Eunuch Xi has said something to the Emperor.”

“A’Rong said that you and General Gu are not sincere to me. He wants me to stay away from you.” Xiao Jie scratched his head; hesitating, he said, “But I don’t think you’re a bad person.”

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, “Your Majesty has been with Eunuch Xi for many years, yet you don’t believe his words?”

Xiao Jie waved his hands, flustered, “I-I do believe him. Zhen just doesn’t believe you’d do this…”

Lin Qingyu interrupted, “Your Majesty, as a grown man, don’t you have your own judgment? Today, if I say that I will not harm you and Eunuch Xi, you will let guard down against me? ”

Xiao Jie puffed up his cheeks, looking angered, “I am asking you kindly. Why must you say that?”

“Then I will tell Your Majesty. I will not—I will not until the General returns.” Lin Qingyu said lightly, “It is up to you whether to believe me or not.”

What Lin Qingyu said was something tacitly shared with Xi Rong. Telling it to Xiao Jie was harmless. But Xi Rong seems not to inform Xiao Jie of the current

situation, otherwise he wouldn't have such a terrified expression. "Then when General Gu comes back, are you going to… "

Lin Qingyu said, "The emperor should ask Eunich Xi. What is it that he will do to the General, once the General comes back."

Xiao Jie was stunned. He murmured, "I'll ask him…" Then he ran out.

Xiao Jie returned to his palace and began looking for Xi Rong all over the place. "A'Rong! Where is A'Rong?"

An eunuch said, "Eunuch Xi is out of the palace today. He said he has something to do back in the Mansion."

"Then I will be leaving too." Xiao Jie said heedless of everything, "Go and prepare the carriage."

Xi Rong didn't use to have a mansion. He lived wherever Xiao Jie lived. Later, Xiao Jie chose a mansion for Xi Rong out of thousands of choices and bestowed it to him. This was originally the residence of Xiao Jie's aunt, Princess Pingchang. Princess Pingchang was the most beloved little sister of the former emperor and her mansion was naturally extremely luxurious. Unfortunately, Princess Pingchang passed away due to illness at a young age

and the mansion remained empty until Xiao Jie came to the throne and ushered in a new owner.

At this time, the doors and windows of the Xi Mansion's study were closed. Xi Rong was having a secret conversation with a mysterious visitor. The guest wore a hooded cloak; when he spoke, he enunciated his words beautifully revealing the deliberate care he put into uttering them.

The visitor was not to be looked down on. Xi Rong did not dare to lower his guard. He asked, "Your Excellency seeking an audience now is it to seek peace or to seek death?"

The man in the hood said, "I am here to negotiate on behalf of our commander, to negotiate a deal with Eunuch Xi."

"Oh?" Xi Rong stared at the man closely, "And what sort of deal might this be that you came seeking me out instead of laying this before the court?"

"Gu Fuzhou killed our crown prince. Innumerable heroes of the Xixia have died on his spear. The people of the Xixia would want nothing more than to eat his flesh and drink his blood." The hooded man said, hate filling his voice,

“The commander offers the return of Yong Liang. All we ask is that General Gu be not granted a good death.”

Xi Rong’s eyes shone with cold. “Yong Liang is a surrounded city. It’s already as good as the Dayu’s. How would you give it back?”

The man in the hood said, “If Your Excellency is willing to help our commander, apart from Gu Fuzhou, the Dayu’s army will lose at most twenty to thirty thousand soldiers. But if you insist on attacking, we will definitely defend. If that were to happen, the Dayu would lose at least fifty thousand soldiers. In exchange for Gu Fuzhou alone, you gain twenty thousand soldiers and an intact Yong Liang. What does Your Excellency think of this?”

Xi Rong said calmly, “A talent like Gu Fuzhou comes but once in a hundred years in the Dayu. Save for him, who can keep the peace in the Northwest? His life cannot be bought with a city.”

The hooded man whispered, “But the question is, does Eunuch Xi want Gu Fuzhou to return to the capital alive?”

Xi Rong’s tone was dangerous, “Why would you say that?”

“If Gu Fuzhou dies in battle, that legendary beauty Imperial Physician will be left without the aid of his husband. He will be nothing but a leather bag.” The hooded man said with an ambiguous expression on his face, “Our king has always been one to cherish jade and incense. He has long heard of about the deeds of the beautiful imperial physician and has developed a yearning. He

wishes to see with his own eyes the beauty who has captivated Gu Fuzhou. If Eunuch Xi could send the beautiful imperial physician to Xixia's capital, 'amity between Qin and Jin' would not be but a dream."

Xi Rong sneered and said, "Even if you have learned a bit of the language, you be better not use it indiscriminately. That is not how you use 'amity between Qin and Jin'."

The hooded man smiled and said, "But Eunuch Xi understands what I mean. Once Gu Fuzhou dies, the grievances between the two countries will be over. Xixia can guarantee that there will be no more trouble. Is Gu Fuzhou's life not worth peace in the Northwest? This, Eunuch Xi would know better than I."

Xi Rong asked, "And what is it that your commander wishes me to do?"

In the shadows, the hooded man smiled, certain of his victory. "What the commander wants is very simple. Nothing more than…" The hooded man

dipped his fingertip in the tea and wrote the word “supply transport” on the table.

Xi Rong was silent for a long time and then said, “I see.”

The hooded man got up and bowed in the manner of the people of the central plains. “So, I shall wait for good news from His Excellency.”

“Go out the side door. Don’t let anyone see you.”

“Naturally.”

After hooded man left, Xi Rong sat alone in thought. Suddenly, he heard a voice from outside, “Your Majesty?”

Xi Rong’s complexion changed suddenly. He immediately opened the door and Xiao Jie’s pale face came into view.

The author has something to say: Soon, soon. Be patient, my dears. I’ll get to it in my own time. =3=

Chapter 94

Xi Rong had a secret meeting in the Mansion with an envoy from the Xixia. The Xi mansion was naturally heavily guarded but they were on guard against outsiders, not the emperor, let alone his younger brother whom he had protected and doted on all his life.

He knew Xiao Jie heard it all.

Having been together for many years, the other party was like another of himself. He was very familiar with every expression and every movement of

Xiao Jie's. However, he has never seen Xiao Jie show such an expression when he was with him — Panicked, stunned, trembling, disappointed and frightened.

Xi Rong felt a sharp pain in his heart but his voice was soft, "Your Majesty."

Xiao Jie froze in place, as if he were looking at a cruel and vicious stranger.

Xi Rong called again, "A'Jie."

It was like Xiao Jie was waking up from a dream. The rims of his eyes instantly reddened. "A'Rong, you… you betrayed, betrayed the…"

Before he could utter the word "country", Xi Rong interrupted Xiao Jie, "A'Jie, you misunderstood me."

"I heard it all! I heard it all!" Xiao Jie's tears welled up in his eyes, "That man wants to make a deal with you. He wants you to kill General Gu and you agreed!"

Xi Rong took two steps forward. He wanted to hug Xiao Jie into his arms, comfort him like when he was a child. Xiao Jie has a soft personality. He grew without the care of his biological mother or imperial mother. He had not a shred of the late emperor's favor and he has suffered a lot of grievances in the sinister palace since he was a child. It is the elder brother's duty to make the younger brother happy. How many times Xiao Jie cried, was how many times he comforted him. But this time, Xiao Jie didn't throw himself into his arms

like he usually did. Rather, he retreated like a frightened kitten. “Do-don’t come closer…”

Xi Rong stopped in his steps and said, “A’Jie, I told you that Lin Qingyu and Gu Fuzhou will not tolerate me being by your side to assist you. Once Gu Fuzhou returns to the capital, Lin Qingyu will attack me. Do you understand?”

Xiao Jie choked. He said, “But you can’t collude with the enemy and betray the country! I’m a bit stupid, but I’m also a descendant of the Xiao Family. General Gu is fighting for the Dayu. You can’t harm him at this time—I-I’m going to go tell the Empress Dowager and Imperial Physician Lin!”

Xi Rong scolded, “Stop.”

Xi Rong had never been so fierce towards him before. He felt wronged and angry at the same time. He began to cry, appearing like pear blossoms bathed in rain, delicate and charming.

Xi Rong said rationally, “Xixia’s envoy came to find me. They want to use Gu Fuzhou’s life to end the war between our two countries. What would happen if I disagreed? Should I have let the envoy go back and tell the Xixia army to give

up on this notion? Or should I have killed him outright? No matter what I do, it would have only made Xixia strengthen their guard against the Dayu."

Xiao Jie couldn't wrap his mind around it but he understood one thing. Xi Rong hadn't actually agreed with the Xixia. "What do you mean……"

Xi Rong's face cleared somewhat and he said, "A'Jie, think about it carefully. Now that I have agreed to Xixia's 'peace negotiation', won't they feel like they've already won? Do you think they'll take the battle at Yong Liang seriously?"

"Then you only pretended to agree — you lied to them?"

Seeing Xiao Jie looking at him with almost the same eyes as usual, Xi Rong heaved a sigh of relief. He said with a smile, "Do you still remember the story of Huang Gai's false surrender that I told you when we were young? He can

feign surrender and we can also feign peace. Don't worry. I won't allow myself, let alone you, to be charged with treason."

"So it's like this!" Xiao Jie was coaxed by Xi Rong in just a few words. He wiped his tears with the back of his hand and said, "You should have said so earlier. I misunderstood you."

Xi Rong grabbed Xiao Jie's hand and wiped his tears with his sleeve. "It's good that we've cleared up this misunderstanding. Alright, don't just stand there. Come in."

The two entered the study and Xi Rong ordered someone to fetch water to wash the emperor's face. Xi Rong asked Xiao Jie why he suddenly left the palace and Xiao Jie told him about his conversation with Lin Qingyu.

"A'Rong, do we have to fight with Imperial Physician Lin and the others?" Xiao Jie asked naively, "I don't want to harm them. I think it's good how things are now. It'll be fine if things continue like this."

Xi Rong patted Xiao Jie's head, and said, "Let's wait for Gu Fuzhou to defeat Xixia."

"Okay." Xiao Jie saw the wet handwriting on the table and asked curiously, "What is this?"

Xi Rong didn't hide it from him. "Gu Fuzhou has been fighting a war of attrition with the Xixia in the Northwest for more than a month. Both sides

are nearing their limits. So Xixia wants to know the Dayu's supply transport route."

Xiao Jie asked, "Are they going to rob us of our provisions?"

Xi Rong nodded. "That should be their plan."

"Oh!" Xiao Jie suddenly became excited, "Then can we tell them the wrong route and then lay an ambush there in advance, killing them by surprise!"

Xi Rong was a little surprised and he said with a smile, "A'Jie has become smarter."

Xiao Jie laughed and said, "You are the only one in this world who would praise me for being smart. We have been together for so long, I've probably picked up a thing or two from you."

Xi Rong opened the map showing the way from Gui Province to Yong Liang, "A'Jie, where is the best place to plant an ambush, you think?"

Xiao Jie gave it serious thought. He pointed to a certain road and said, "Here. It's the farthest from the real road the provisions will take and it's a narrow

path between the canyons. Once the enemy army enters, they won't be able to retreat!"

Xi Rong hesitated for a moment and then said with a smile, "Then, we'll do as A'Jie says."

Xiao Jie finally made a contribution for the Dayu and he was very happy. "By the way, I think we should tell the Empress Dowager and Imperial Physician Lin about this. They're also very concerned about the situation in the Northwest."

"No need." Xi Rong stopped smiling. "They don't need to know."

Xiao Jie hesitated. "But…"`

Xi Rong took on a serious expression, "A'Jie, you have to remember that Lin Qingyu wants my life. Letting him know too much isn't a good thing. Anything might be his blade to take my life."

Xiao Jie was dazed hearing it. Although Xi Rong kept saying that Lin Qingyu was going to harm them, he always felt that Lin Qingyu would not. Lin Qingyu was as good-looking as an immortal; can his heart really be so vicious?

Although Xiao Jie had finally reconciled with Xi Rong, he really had been given a fright during it. Xi Rong was afraid that he would have lingering fears and so he specially found a famous opera troupe in the capital to perform at

the palace. Xiao Jie loved to watch operas and when he was in the mood, he could sit in front of the stage for the entire day.

Within the Imperial Palace, the stage was constructed in the Peony Garden. The Peony Garden was not far from Ci'an Palace and the stage was placed there originally to make it convenient for the Empress Dowager to listen to various performances. But now it has become a place that disturbed the Empress Dowager's peace.

The Empress Dowager was discussing with Lin Qingyu about taxation in Jiangnan when the melodious singing was heard drifting in from afar. The Empress Dowager was displeased and asked, "Who's listening to opera in the Peony Garden?"

Lin Qingyu said, "There is no one in the Emperor's harem and all the concubines live in Jinyang Garden. Who else could it be?"

The Empress Dowager furrowed her brows and said slowly, "The emperor is a leisurely man."

"That is a good thing." Lin Qingyu said calmly, "For someone like the emperor, at least by doing nothing, he causes no trouble to others."

"Having said that, the Northwest is still at war after all. Even if the Emperor doesn't care about governing, he should at least make a show of it so as not to

give the officials something to criticize." After thinking about it, the empress dowager still decided to have someone call in Xiao Jie.

Xiao Jie didn't keep the Empress Dowager waiting and he rushed over almost immediately. After being scolded by the Empress Dowager, Xiao Jie finally realized what he had done. Not paying any mind that Lin Qingyu was there, he said, "Zhen now knows that Zhen was wrong. Zhen did not give it enough thought… I'm sorry, Imperial Mother, I will never listen to operas again."

The emperor admitted his mistake so sincerely that the Empress Dowager didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "It's not that Your Majesty can not listen to opera. Simply that there is a time and place for everything. Once the Dayu has reigned in the chaos in the Northwest, aijia too would love to watch the opera."

Xiao Jie nodded. "I understand, thank you for Imperial Mother's teaching. When peace has returned, I will invite Imperial Mother to listen to the opera with Sixth Brother."

Xiao Jie looked younger than his actual age and the way he nodded made him look very lovable. Although the Empress Dowager was negligent towards this bastard son in the past, she held no malicious intention and scolding him this much was already enough. It so happened that it was time for the evening meal

and so the Empress Dowager invited Xiao Jie to stay and eat. “Qingyu, you too.”

Lin Qingyu said, “This humble official already partook of the evening meal at Ci’an Palace yesterday.”

The Empress Dowager laughed and said, “Li’er always eats more when you’re around.”

Throughout the meal, Xiao Jie kept looking as though he had something to say. The Empress Dowager asked him if he had anything to say and he decisively said no. After dinner, Xiao Jie went back to Qinzheng Hall.

The Empress Dowager couldn’t help but say, “It seems the Emperor isn’t beyond hope. If he weren’t the monarch of a country, he could be regarded as a child with a pure heart.”

Lin Qingyu let out an “en”.

“He will never be a wise ruler but if the Emperor can get away from Xi Rong, with a little bit of guidance, at least he won’t be manipulated by others.”

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly, “Unfortunately, he’ll never be able to leave.”

“You might be a little too over-confident about that,” said the Empress Dowager, “Even brothers with the same father and mother will turn against each other for their own selfish interests, let alone them. I’ve been in the palace

for so many years and I've seen everything. The emperor grew to rely on Xi Rong so much because he was never doted on. If we find him a dignified, elegant, compassionate and understanding consort, someone who he can entrust his feeling to, maybe he won't value Xi Rong so much." The more the Empress Dowager thought about it, the more she felt that this was a good solution. "The emperor is already of age and we are now past the filial piety period for the late emperor. It would be a good time to find a concubine for him."

The empress dowager thought that Lin Qingyu would agree with her. Unexpectedly, Lin Qingyu gave no response. The empress dowager couldn't help asking, "Qingyu, what do you think?"

Lin Qingyu said, "The Empress Dowager must forgive me but I have no interest in using marriage to imprison others."

The Empress Dowager was slightly taken aback and her expression became a little colder, "Forget it." She said, losing interest, "We'll just have to watch and see for now."

It was night and Xi Rong personally served Xiao Jie to bed. Before going to bed, they talked, catching up on what had happened during the day, a habit they've had since they were children. Xi Rong asked Xiao Jie about the opera

he watched today. Xiao Jie had on a disappointed expression as he said, “I’m not going to watch opera in the palace anymore.”

Xi Rong asked, “Why?”

Xiao Jie told Xi Rong what had happened today. “Imperial Mother is right. The soldiers of the Northwest are fighting so desperately. It’s bad enough that I can’t even help, how can I be enjoying this kind of luxury in the palace?”

Xi Rong cared not a whit about this. “You ate with the Empress Dowager and Lin Qingyu?”

“Sixth Brother was there too.” Xiao Jie said plainly whatever was on his mind. “Sixth Brother is still the same, he doesn’t respond to anything. He only ever smiles at Imperial Physician Lin…”

Xi Rong interrupted him, “Did you mention the transport ambush to them?”

Xiao Jie was momentarily stunned. His eyes revealed a little guilt. “I didn’t.”

There was no change in Xiao Jie’s face that could ever escape Xi Rong’s eyes. “Do you still want to tell them?”

“I… In the end, I said nothing. That’s what you want, isn’t it?” Xiao Jie covered his head with the quilt and said in a muffled voice, “I’m going to sleep. You

should go."

Xi Rong's eyes were half-lidded. "This servant will now withdraw."

As soon as Xi Rong called himself "this servant", Xiao Jie knew he was angry. But he really didn't know what to do. Why did Xi Rong and Lin Qingyu have to insist on fighting to the death? Before he ascended to the throne, these two obviously got along fine.

Xiao Jie fell asleep full of worries. After an unknown amount of time, he was awakened by the sound of "Your Majesty! Your Majesty!" When he opened his eyes, he saw the eunuch who served him, Xiao Xuanzi.

There was the sound of rushing footsteps outside. All feelings of drowsiness suddenly left Xiao Jie and he asked, "What happened?"

Panicking, Xiao Xuanzi said, "Your Majesty, there's an assassin in the palace. Eunuch Xi, he – he…"

Xiao Jie grabbed Xiao Xuanzi's shoulder. "What happened to him?"

"Eunuch Xi was seriously injured. He's lost a lot of blood… He's resting now in the side hall…"

Xiao Jie rolled and scrambled out of the bed, running to the side hall with bare feet. The imperial guards have already been dispatched and the palace was completely surrounded; no one was getting in or out. Xi Rong had already

been carried to the bed. There was an eye-piercing knife wound on the left side of his abdomen, blood kept gushing from the wound. Because of the blood loss, Xi Rong's face looked pale. He was in a miserable state but his mind remained sharp and clear.

When Xiao Jie saw him, he cried, "Where's the imperial physician? Call the imperial physician quickly!"

Xiao Xuanzi said, "I've already sent someone to fetch him. The imperial physician should be on the way."

Xi Rong grabbed Xiao Jie's hand, breathing weakly, "Your Majesty, this servant is fine. Don't worry."

"How come…" Xiao Jie hugged Xi Rong, on the verge of collapse, "How could there be an assassin in the palace? Why would someone want to kill you!"

Xi Rong showed a strange smile, "Who aside from them would have assassins bold enough to enter the palace?"

Xiao Jie was out of breath from crying, "Wh-who?"

Xi Rong groaned in pain. Xiao Xuanzi hurriedly said, "Eunuch Xi says it

should be someone from the Tianji Camp."

Xiao Jie was dazed but his tear kept rolling. "Why?"

Xiao Xuanzi said, "As I remember, the token of the Tianji Camp is in the hands of Imperial Physician Lin."

"…Imperial Physician Lin?"

Xi Rong closed his eyes. There was sudden strength in his hands, "So, do you still want to get close to Lin Qingyu and tell him everything?"

Xiao Jie cried and shook his head. "I don't! I won't tell the Empress Dowager and Lin Qingyu anymore. I won't say anything, I just want you to be well… A'Rong, don't die, I won't let you die!"

Xi Rong's injury looked scary but he didn't hurt his vitals and he was in no mortal danger. However, due to excessive blood loss, his vitality was depleted and so he had to rest for a while.

There was an assassin in the Emperor's palace. This was top priority. Wu Zhan didn't dare to be negligent in the slightest and he led the imperial guards to search the palace the entire night. However, no clues could be found. When

Lin Qingyu heard about this, he questioned Wu Zhan and the imperial physician who had treated Xi Rong that night. He then understood everything.

“You needn’t bother about this matter anymore.” Lin Qingyu said, “The assassin cannot be caught.”

Wu Zhan said, “Ah? Why?”

“You think an assassin who has the ability to come and go without a trace in the palace cannot even kill a mere eunuch? The only one this kind of hole-ridden trick can deceive is the Emperor, who’s now lost his head over his concern.”

Wu Zhan still didn’t quite understand, “Imperial Physician Lin means…”

Lin Qingyu said, “Xi Rong just wanted to seize the Emperor’s heart. He wanted the Emperor to stand firmly by his side.”

Wu Zhan hissed, “Turns out that this was nothing but a self-injury trick. He’s awfully determined, even injuring himself with his own hands”

Lin Qingyu smiled suddenly. “Indeed.”

Xi Rong’s actions reminded him of Gu Fuzhou. Back then, in order to return to the capital from the Northwest, in order to return to him, Gu Fuzhou didn’t

hesitate to poison himself. On this point, Gu Fuzhou too was a determined man.

That's why this time, he would definitely use all his might to come back.

The author has something to say: the tenacious Er Zhuang lives another day. I'll give you another three days, no more!

Ancient and Modern Mini Theater:

When he first brought the Great Beauty home, the amnesiac Classmate Jiang still didn't fully believe his words. It just so happened that Classmate Jiang's

friend paid an IQ tax and bought a polygraph machine online. If you tell a lie, the polygraph machine will beep.

Then–

Great Beauty: Jiang Gongzi is a hardworking person

Polygraph machine: beep——

Great Beauty: Jiang Gongzi never lazes around in bed

Polygraph machine: beep——

Great Beauty: Jiang Gongzi is my husband.

Polygraph machine: …

Classmate Jiang: Eh

Chapter 95

After Xi Rong was injured, he stayed in Xiao Jie's palace. The two were practically inseparable. Lin Qingyu heard from Xiao Songzi that Xiao Jie would stay by the other's sick bed whenever he was free and would even feed Xi Rong his medicine himself. Xiao Jie has always been the pampered one and he wasn't very good at serving others. He was clumsy when feeding Xi Rong, his medicine and the concoction would spill on the bed; but Xi Rong basked in the attention.

"How is this an emperor and his eunuch?" Xiao Songzi marveled, "Even blood brothers aren't so close."

Xi Rong's ruse of self-injury actually worked. Apart from him, Xiao Jie held no one else in his eyes. As soon as morning court was over, Xiao Jie rushed to the bedroom – he wanted to accompany Xi Rong as he had his bandages changed.

Xiao Jie sat in the sedan chair and complained to Xiao Xuanzi, "It makes no difference whether I attend morning court or not. I don't understand any of those things. In any case, the Empress Dowager is behind the curtain to listen in on court affair. And Lin…" Halfway through the words, Xiao Jie gritted his teeth, and said bitterly, "There's also that person listening in. They don't need

me. So why must they keep me in Zichen Palace to hold court? With this time, I might as well accompany A'Rong."

Xiao Xuanzi said, "Your Majesty, Eunuch Xi said that you are the Son of Heaven and you sit upon the Imperial Throne. Save for you, no one can sit on the Dragon Throne in the Zichen Hall. By sitting on it, you are telling all the civil and military officials that the Dayu belongs to your Xiao Family."

"The Dayu has always belonged to the Xiao family." Xiao Jie said, "All the officials know it well. There is no need for me to remind them."

Xiao Xuanzi said in a low voice, "But I heard that some people think that half of the Dayu is surnamed Wen and the other half is surnamed Lin."

Xiao Jie was taken aback for a moment. "Wen…Lin?"

This 'Wen', of course, referred to Empress Dowager Wen. After Empress Dowager Wen began holding court behind the curtain, Wen Guogong returned to the cabinet and many of the members of Wen Clan attained important positions. Among them was a man named Li Chan. Xiao Jie had some impressions that this man — appearing pure and bright, despite his young age he was already a fourth-rank assistant minister in the Ministry of War. Li Chan had said a lot of things in today's morning court. It seemed he

was asking the Ministry of Revenue for the funds and provisions of the army in the Northwest. As for this 'Lin'…

Just as Xiao Jie was lost in thought, the sedan chair suddenly stopped. He looked to the front and his face suddenly sank.

This 'Lin', who else could it be but Lin Qingyu?

Lin Qingyu and Li Chan ran into Xiao Jie on their way to the Ministry of War and as decorum dictated, they knelt down to salute him.

No matter how stupid Xiao Jie was, he was well aware of how he came by his throne. Before Xi Rong's "assassination attempt", he has always polite to Lin Qingyu, never letting him perform such exaggerated courtesy. He had even wanted to take the initiative to get close to him because of his pretty face. But now, whenever he saw Lin Qingyu, he would think of Xi Rong dying in a pool of blood.

In his eyes, Lin Qingyu was still the same Lin Qingyu with that cold demeanor forming a bewildering contrast with his bright distinctive appearance. But whenever he caught sight of him, his heart would be alarmed and his body

would be sent leaping in fear. — It was this kind of great beauty who almost took away A'Rong's life.

He won't admire a person who wants to harm A'Rong. He wants to protect A'Rong. He won't let anyone hurt him again.

Lin Qingyu and Li Chan stayed kneeling on the ground. Having not heard 'rise' after such a long time, Lin Qingyu looked up at Xiao Jie. Meeting his gaze, Xiao Jie shrank back subconsciously, fear and wariness in his eyes. It wasn't until Xiao Xuanzi reminded him that Xiao Jie said, "Then, g-get up."

Lin Qingyu said, "Your Majesty's complexion isn't so good. Is something weighing on Your Majesty's mind?"

Xiao Jie tried hard to keep a composed face and said sternly, "Zhen's affairs is none of Imperial Physician Lin's concern — Xiao Xuanzi, let us head back to the palace."

Li Chan is one of the Empress Dowager and Lin Qingyu's agents in court. Seeing the emperor's attitude towards Lin Qingyu, Li Chan couldn't help becoming worried. "Imperial Physician Lin, are you certain you do not wish to explain the situation to the emperor? Even if His Majesty does not concern himself with the running of the country, he is still the Son of Heaven. It is better to have his Imperial favor than to not."

Lin Qingyu said, "Explanations are useless. Fools will only believe what they want to believe. Besides, since Xi Rong's intention is to place the blame of this

attempted 'assassination' on the Tainji Camp, he must have made certain that the Tianji Camp would not expose him. If my guess isn't wrong, during this period while Xi Rong was in power, he must have used the name of the Emperor to win people over to his side."

In some people's eyes, even the Empress Dowager, who held court behind the curtain, is, after all, just a waiqi. There is no need to mention how little they thought of a mere imperial physician. This was true for Cui Lian and it was also true for those old kings from the Xiao Clan. In the name of loyalty to the Xiao Family, they would rather take orders from a eunuch than see a waiqi monopolize power.

Li Chan said in surprise, "But don't you hold the Tianji Camp's token?"

"The Tianji Camp is the Emperor's fangs and talons. For generations, they have served only he who sits upon the Dragon Throne. Compared to the Emperor, my token is nothing." Lin Qingyu mused, "What I am wondering about is why Xi Rong would pull this ruse now? Why not earlier? Why not later? Why now?"

Li Chan thought for a while and said, "Could it be because of the Northwest? Right now General Gu is trying to take back Yong Liang. Yong Liang is the Dayu's gateway to the north. Once Yong Liang is taken back, that would be half the trouble in the Northwest laid to rest."

Lin Qingyu said, "With him being injured, Xi Rong has to rest and recuperate. He is unable to interfere in government affairs. At this juncture, why has he

chosen to risk letting go of power?"

"Perhaps, he wants us to relax our guard?" Li Chan suddenly realized, his expression changing slightly, "Does Imperial Physician Lin mean that he's planning a big move?"

"Before the storm, there is always calm." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "As long as he still has some sense left in him, he shouldn't be looking for trouble at this time lest Xixia take advantage of it."

"He is a eunuch." Li Chan was even more worried. "Since ancient times, how many powerful eunuchs have actually cared about the country and the people? As long as they can achieve their goals, there is nothing they won't do."

Lin Qingyu suppressed his surging malice and slowly took a deep breath. "But we are not him. At this time, our focus should solely be on the Northwest — where is that batch of provisions now?"

Li Chan said, "Based on the estimated schedule, it should have already reached Yong Liang."

Lin Qingyu stayed in the Ministry of War until late at night. He originally intended to spend the night in the palace but changed his mind in the last second. The General's carriage was waiting at the gates of the palace. Lin Qingyu put away the umbrella he used to shield himself from the snow and got

into the carriage. He said to the groom, “We’re not heading to the Gu Mansion. Go to the Lin Residence instead.”

Father Lin and Mother Lin thought that something serious must have happened for their eldest son to come unannounced in the middle of the night. Lin Qingyu assured them that nothing has happened for now.

Lin Rushan frowned, “For now? You mean, something will happen?”

“This is just my guess and intuition. But just in case, I’d like for Father to ask for leave from the Imperial Hospital. Take Mother and Qinghe away from the capital. Lie low for awhile.” Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, “I remember that

Grandmother's seventieth birthday is next month. You can go to Jin Province and celebrate with her."

Mother Lin said with concern, "If we're leaving, what about you?"

"Of course, I will stay."

"But……"

"Madam, don't ask anymore. Qingyu has his own plans." Lin Rushan said decisively, "I'm sorry to trouble Madam to begin the preparations."

Mother Lin wanted to say more but kept hesitating. Unable to hide her worry, she said, "Qingyu, you have to take good care of yourself, alright?"

Lin Qingyu gave her a comforting smile. "I will."

Lin Rushan could give no warnings to his eldest son. He simply said, "Be very careful."

The next day, Lin Rushan left the capital with his wife and child on the pretext of visiting relatives. During the next few days, Lin Qingyu attended morning court as usual. He occasionally went to see Xiao Li and took time to see Xiao

Songzi who was not feeling well — Xiao Songzi had hurt his throat from talking too much. A few days of keeping quiet should solve the problem.

The 15th day of every month was the day Gu Fuzhou used to look forward to the most. Dayu's officials only had this one day a month to rest. Lin Qingyu was taking half a day off to feed the little Gu worms snake blood in the medicine room. Yuan Yin walked in and said, "Madam, someone delivered a letter."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Who?"

"I do not know. The messenger left as soon as he left the letter." Yuan Yin said, "According to the guard at the door, it was a man wearing a hood."

Lin Qingyu stared at the completely blank and unadorned envelope, feeling a little uneasy. Yuan Yin stood aside. He watched as Lin Qingyu opened the

envelope and took a look at the letter. With just one glance, Lin Qingyu's body turned cold.

Yuan Yin carefully probed, "Madam…?"

Lin Qingyu carefully set down the little Gu. Saying as he did so, "Prepare the carriage. I am heading to the palace."

Hua Lu hurriedly said, "I'll help you change your clothes." If you wish to enter the palace, you have to do so wearing your official uniform.

Lin Qingyu said, "No need."

Lin Qingyu put on a fox fur cloak and left the house. He told Yuan Yin, "Find that messenger."

"Yes, Madam." Yuan Yin asked, "What should we do with him once we find him?"

Lin Qingyu got into the carriage and without looking back, said, "Kill him."

Dressed in this own personal clothes, Lin Qingyu walked all straight to Qinzheng Hall, where he happened to meet Li Chan coming out of the hall.

"Imperial Physician Lin!" Li Chan said anxiously, "I was just going to find you.

Something's wrong. The supplies sent to Yong Liang…"

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "It was robbed."

Li Chan was stunned. "You already know? Fortunately, the officer who transported the provisions is very skilled. He did his all and protected 20% of the supplies but that is only enough to support the army for a few days."

"Let's go in." Lin Qingyu said, "The Emperor will tell us what's going on."

In Qinzgheng Hall, Xiao Jie, the Prime Minister Cui Lian and the Minister of Revenue, the Nan'an Hou were all there. Xi Rong was also there, his injury

obviously hasn't yet healed and his androgynous face had on a sickly pallor; but as before, he maintained his calm and composed manner.

Lin Qingyu cast him but a fleeting glance before turning to Xiao Jie, "Your Majesty, why don't you explain?"

Xiao Jie's already pale face turned even paler. "Zhe-zhen does not know what you're talking about."

"Is that so? But someone told me that the Emperor has 'negotiated peace' with the Xixia and that the bountiful grain and fodder is your gift to them for the peace negotiation."

Xiao Jie looked blank. "Zhen didn't! I just…"

Xi Rong cut off Xiao Jie's words, "Who told Imperial Physician Lin? Imperial Physician Lin, you must beware misinformation sown by the enemy."

Lin Qingyu simply found it ridiculous, "Between you and I, is there any need for someone else to feed misinformation?"

Xi Rong seemed to have expected this day long ago and said indifferently, "I did have contact with Xixia's envoys. I pretended to negotiate peace with them

to lure them into an ambush. I still have the Xixia envoys' letters in my house and the troops who laid in wait for the ambush can testify."

Xiao Jie nodded quickly. "I can also testify! I agreed with A'Rong's plan. I helped come up with this plan. I don't know why they weren't fooled…"

Hearing Xiao Jie stammer through his account of what had happened, Lin Qingyu's features filled with hostility. "If you could figure that it would be easy to lay an ambush along the narrow path, why can't the Xixia commander? How could any person with sense use this transport route? By giving them this route, you gave them the route to rule out and all they had to do was look for the opposite route. The Xixia commander defeated Zhao Mingwei and within a year captured nearly half of the Dayu's Northwest. Even Xu Junyuan called him the "Demon Commander". He knows better than anyone else where to store grain and how to transport it. He can even surmise the situation in the

capital so clearly. Where did you come from? Confidently attempting to outwit him. You think someone of insignificant talent can deceive him?"

Xiao Jie felt guilty and didn't know what to do. "Zhen didn't do it on purpose. I really just wanted to help…"

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly, "All by your little self?"

Nan'an Hou's expression changed. Cui Lian said angrily, "Impudent! Lin Qingyu, don't forget who you are! You are talking to the Emperor!"

Lin Qingyu didn't even spare a glance at Cui Lian, thinking it a waste of time. He asked Xi Rong, "The Emperor was unable to see through it. Are you saying, you failed to see through it too?"

No flaw could be found on Xi Rong's face. "I really did not expect for the Xixia commander to be able to see through it so clearly."

"You didn't? Fine." Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Guards."

Two palace guards came in. "Your Majesty, Imperial Physician Lin."

"Take Xi Rong out — flog him to death."

In the ensuing silence, Xiao Jie was the first to react. "No! I won't let you hurt A'Rong again!" He jumped up and stood in front of Xi Rong, "I, I am the

emperor, why are you giving order when I'm right here!"

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "He collaborated with the enemy and betrayed the country, bewitching the Emperor's heart."

Xi Rong covered the wound in his abdomen, coughed lowly and said, "As I've said, I have evidence. I didn't collaborate with the enemy, let alone betray the country."

Cui Lian added, "Imperial Physician Lin accuses Eunuch Xi of betraying the country. What evidence do you have?"

Lin Qingyu smiled suddenly. "Are you all misunderstanding something? I will kill him. What evidence do I need?"

A crack finally appeared on Xi Rong's perpetually calm face. "You…"

"Even if you did sincerely try to deceive them, so what?" Lin Qingyu looked at Xi Rong, as if looking at a stray cur, "I will kill you regardless."

Chapter 96

Qinzheng Hall was where the rightful emperor handled government affairs, it was where he met civil and military officials. It's very name spoke of diligent attention to state affairs and love for the people. Every word spoken in the Hall of Qinzheng could determine the national economy and the people's livelihood; the rise and fall of the Dayu.

Once, Lin Qingyu had stood in this hall as an imperial physician to diagnose the pulse of the late emperor. Today, he was still standing here as an imperial physician. The person he faced was the prime minister, the eunuch, and the emperor.

These people wore the uniforms of their office — the python robes, dragon robes — while Lin Qingyu only had on a white robe and a fox fur coat. There was nothing on his body to connote a powerful official. He looked nothing more than the handsome son of a scholarly family.

However, it was this powerful minister who seemed not at all like one, who now stood unbridled in from of the emperor acting willfully. In front of the

emperor, he declared bluntly that he would take the life of the one closest to the emperor, the one the emperor trusted the most.

Lin Qingyu issued his order once again, “Take Xi Rong down.”

The two guards looked at each other, embarrassment reflected in each other’s eyes. They were members of General Gu’s troops and they have always been loyal to the Gu family. But this was the Son of Heaven; even with no real power, he still sat on the Dragon Throne. Even Imperial Physician Lin had accorded him courtesy before. Why was he completely disregarding etiquette for the emperor and his ministers now? This was serious enough to be considered rebellion.

Before the two could move, Xiao Jie, who stood in front of Xi Rong, said loudly, “You dare do this?!”

Lin Qingyu said, “I do.”

Nan’an Hou too felt that Lin Qingyu was going too far and reminded him aloud, “Imperial Physician Lin, no one wanted what happened to the provisions. Even if His Majesty miscalculated, it was an unintentional mistake.

Being so disrespectful to the Emperor, are you not afraid that His Majesty would punish you?"

"Yes… yes, I am the emperor! You can't talk to me like that! You can't harm my people!" Xiao Jie was a little hysterical, "I want to punish you! Come, take Lin Qingyu down. Beat–beat him to death!"

Once he said these words, Xiao Jie's voice turned weepy. He never thought of taking Lin Qingyu's like but Lin Qingyu wanted A'Rong to die. A'Rong can't die so Lin Qingyu had to die.

He didn't want to do this, but he really couldn't help it. As long as A'Rong was fine, he didn't want to care about anything else anymore.

"Your Majesty." Li Chan knelt down resolutely, "Eunuch Xi is indeed under suspicion of collaborating with the enemy. Imperial Physician Lin wishes for

His Majesty to listen to his words, to rid the Emperor of evil ministers. He was carried away with his words in a moment of urgency…"

Cui Lian sneered and said, "It is not his place as a fifth-rank imperial physician to rid the Emperor of evil minister. Especially when we have yet to prove who is the trusted ministers and who is the sycophant."

Lin Qingyu looked quietly at Xiao Jie. The last traces of pity and kindness in his eyes suddenly disappeared when he uttered the words "beat him to death."

A thought suddenly popped into Xi Rong's mind — Lin Qingyu now entertained murderous thoughts towards Xiao Jie.

Xi Rong had no doubt that Lin Qingyu wanted his own life; but before this, Lin Qingyu probably never thought of killing Xiao Jie. He would die; Xiao Jie would live. Lin Qingyu and the Empress Dowager could completely control Xiao Jie and thus control the entire Dayu.

Once Xiao Jie died, only Xiao Li remained with the blood of the late Emperor. None of the civil and military officials, none of the frontier soldiers would take a dullard as their emperor. If they insist on supporting Xiao Li to rise to power, not only will the brothers of the late emperor begin to scheme, even the

northern border may make a move. Therefore, it was essential to Lin Qingyu and the Empress Dowager's plans that Xiao Jie live.

But at this moment, Lin Qingyu truly wanted Xiao Jie to die.

This wasn't how Lin Qingyu normally reacted — Lin Qingyu was about to lose control.

And Lin Qingyu's loss of control was exactly what he wanted to see.

Standing behind Xiao Jie, Xi Rong bent down and said in a low voice, "Your Majesty, did you mean what you said just now?"

Xiao Jie was in a trance, not daring to look into Lin Qingyu's eyes. He bit his lip until it turned red. "Lin Qingyu looks down on the emperor and has

committed rebellion. His crime is unforgivable and he deserves to be executed."

Xi Rong's lips curled up. He clapped his hands and said, "Master Xie."

"This minister is here."

Except for Lin Qingyu, everyone turned towards the voice at the same time to see a solemn man striding in. This person was dressed in a black tunic with a sword tied to his waist. This was the leader of the Tianji Camp, Xie Min.

Xie Min knelt down on one knee in front of Xiao Jie. "Greetings to the Emperor."

Xi Rong said, "Did you hear the Emperor's order clearly?"

Xie Min nodded slightly, stood up and drew his sword, holding it in his right hand. The words 'diligence in state affairs' written on the plaque hanging

within the hall, reflected on the surface of his sword. Step by step, he approached Lin Qingyu.

“No!” Li Chan raised his hand and blocked Xie Min’s way, “Imperial Physician Lin has the token of the Tianji Camp granted to him by the late emperor himself. He is your master!”

Xie Min was expressionless. “The Tianji Camp serves only the Emperor. Master Li, please step aside.”

Li Chan looked back at Lin Qingyu, only to see him staring at the sword, his eyes hidden under his long butterfly-wing lashes. No one could possibly guess what he was thinking. Li Chan was very quick-witted and he shouted to the two imperial guards, “Go and call the Empress Dowager!”

A greasy voice sounded, “When was it ever an outsider’s place to issue orders regarding the affairs of our Xiao Family?”

Xiao Jie’s ninth imperial uncle, King Heng appeared at the doors of Qinzheng Hall, followed by elites soldiers he had secretly transferred from his fief to the

capital. “From now on, unless the Emperor gives the order, no one can step one foot out of Qinzheng Palace.”

Xiao Jie said in a daze, “Ninth Imperial Uncle? Why are you…”

King Heng glanced at Lin Qingyu, snorted coldly, and said, “I have come late with my protection and caused the Emperor to be frightened.”

In desperation, Li Chan knelt down again: “Your Majesty! Your Majesty, please think of the soldiers in the Northwest, of the people of the Dayu. Just as the Imperial Physician Lin said just now, the fact that the demon commander was able to find Xi Rong to ‘negotiate peace’ shows that this person is intimately familiar with the situation in the capital. If there is a change in the palace at this time, we will fall into his trap. With the demon commander’s tricks of manipulating people’s hearts, he will definitely take advantage of this void and disturb the morale of our army. Until matters in the Northwest are settled, no upheaval may happen in the capital!”

“What are you talking about, Assistant Minister?” Xi Rong said with a smile, “What change to the capital could there be from executing a fifth-rank imperial physician?”

Li Chan said, “Imperial Physician Lin is the wife of General Gu. If the General were to find out that Imperial Physician Lin died in the palace…”

Xi Rong let out an “Oh” and then downplaying the matter, said, “Assistant Minister, there is no need to worry. The Emperor will not let General Gu

know before General Gu regains Yong Liang."

Li Chan was sweating profusely. He was running out of options. Could it be that Lin Qingyu really wanted for blood to spill in Qinzheng Hall today?

Xi Rong's pupil shrank suddenly. "Master Xie, what are you waiting for?"

From out the corner of Li Chan's eyes, Xie Min's grip around the sword hilt tightened; still, Lin Qingyu showed no response. He couldn't help shouting: "Lin Qingyu!"

As soon as the words fell, Lin Qingyu raised his lashes, looked at the man holding the sword in front of him. He said slowly, "Master Xie, just now, you said that you serve only the emperor?"

Xie Min said, "That is right."

"If the Son of Heaven behind you was not the one recognized by the late emperor; if he was not the one mandated by Heaven, would you still obey his orders?"

Xie Min paused, "What do you mean?"

"I was the same as Li Chan before. My concern was to keep the status quo in the capital lest the Xixia gain a chance to take advantage of it. I wanted the soldiers in the Northwest to have nothing to worry about. Now, I understand." Lin Qingyu looked at coldly at the pair of brothers Xi Rong and Xiao Jie. He

said, “Only when those who get in the way disappear completely, can the capital be truly stable.”

Xi Rong’s face suddenly changed color. “Lin Qingyu is insidious and cunning. Do not give him the chance to confuse people – Xie Min, do it.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Eunuch Xi, why are you so anxious? The late emperor gave me the token of the Tianji Camp. Even if it is not enough for Master Xie to serve me, it should at least afford me time to finish what I have to say — What say you, Master Xie?”

Xie Min hesitated for a moment. “What exactly do you have to say?”

“Just now Eunuch Xi clapped his hands and Master Xie immediately appeared.” Lin Qingyu mocked, “I won’t be following suit.”

Saying so, a rough and resounding voice came from the direction of the door, “Make way, make way… What are you doing blocking the door!?”

King Heng was being jostled from behind. He turned around and said angrily, “Who is it!”

The newcomer apologized and said with a smile, “My apologies, Ninth King. There’s a bit too many people in your entourage and they’ve filled up all the

space. I had no choice but to position the imperial guards and the men from the cavalry camp around your people."

King Heng was so angry that he was letting off a chill. He dropepd his obsequitous tone, "Wu Zhan! You brought so many soldiers into the palace, are you trying to rebel!"

Wu Zhan asked back, "Then why did King Heng bring so many soldiers here?"

"Naturally, it is to protect His Majesty!"

Wu Zhan laughed loudly and said, "Then this general is here to protect His Majesty as well. But the emperor this general wishes to protect is not the unjustly named Emperor Chuxi, but the late emperor."

"What utter nonsense! His Majesty is the true Son of Heaven appointed by the late emperor, righteous and true. I think you are colluding with Lin Qingyu and orchestrating a rebellion!"

King Heng spoke firmly but he couldn't see Xiao Jie and Xi Rong's reaction. Xiao Jie knew how he came by the throne and he panicked, "A'Rong…"

Xi Rong forced himself to calm down. "Don't be afraid, it's alright."

Wu Zhan stopped smiling and said seriously, "Bring him up!"

An imperial guard pushed a gray-haired man into the hall. The man knelt in

front of Lin Qingyu, his head lowered. "…Imperial Physician Lin."

The voice wasn't deep like an ordinary man's, but rather, sharp and reedy. Xi Rong guessed his identity as soon as he heard it. "Could it be…?"

The man raised his head slowly, Xiao Jie had a clear view of his face and he said in astonishment, "Eunuch Xue?"

Xue Ying, the eunuch in charge of administration during the late emperor's reign. He had served the late emperor for many years. When the late emperor grew seriously ill, Xue Ying suddenly chose to retire and returned home. There had been no news of him since.

Wu Zhan said to Xue Ying, "Eunuch Xue, do not be afraid. Tell us everything you know. This general shall protect you."

Xue Ying glanced at Xie Min. "When the late emperor was seriously ill, he wrote a will and handed it over to this servant. He tasked me with keeping it safe and to announce it to the world when he passed away."

Cui Lian said, "What nonsense! I saw the late emperor's edict with my own eyes. The late emperor proclaimed His Majesty as his heir to continue his great line. If you had an edict entrusted to you, why didn't you present it at that time? Instead, you waited until today to put on this sham!"

Xue Ying said as though delivering a recitation, "Back then, King Ning was supervising the country, he had the power of the government and the people.

The late emperor was forced to write the imperial edict establishing him as crown prince. When the late emperor's mind cleared, he regretted his mistake and issued a second edict. When the previous emperor passed away, King Ning ascended the throne. If this servant had taken out the edict at that time, would it not have spelled my death?"

Color returned to Li Chan's face and he asked, "Where is that edict now?"

"This servant escaped from the palace and hid the edict behind the plaque in Qinzheng Hall."

Xie Min raised his hand towards the plaque and struck it with his palm. The plaque shook and a sealed imperial edict fell down, which Xie Min caught

firmly in his hand. Xie Min looked at it and said solemnly, “This is indeed the handwriting and seal of the late emperor.”

Cui Lian suddenly turned to Xi Rong. “How is this possible!”

“Heh…” Xi Rong laughed, a vile expression on his face. “Did Imperial Physician Lin foresee this day long ago and that’s why you forged a copy of the late emperor’s will?”

“Shut you filthy mouth!” Wu Zhan scolded bitterly, “Even Master Xie says this last edict was written by the late emperor himself. What else do you have to say!”

Xiao Jie’s legs went limp and he almost fell down. Xi Rong held him up. “Could it be that your so-called late emperor’s edict was to appoint the sixth prince as heir?” It was like Xi Rong had heard some great joke, “The late emperor is so wise and powerful, how could he hand over the the empire Dayu to a mentally incomplete prince?”

Xie Min shook his head. “The edict states that the former Crown Prince Xiao Cheng is the only candidate to inherit the throne and that it cannot be abolished.”

Li Chan immediately said, “The late prince’s concubine mother, Chen Shi, once committed the great crime of deceiving the emperor but even then, the late emperor simply banished her into the cold palace and did not implicate the late prince. It showed that the late emperor had high hopes for the late

prince. The late emperor never expressed his intention to depose the crown prince in front of anyone. How could he just suddenly depose him? There must be more to this matter."

A chill came to his heart, Xi Rong took a few steps back and said in a low voice, "It's not over yet."

Xiao Jie cried and pulled him to a stop. "A'Rong…"

Xi Rong suddenly shook off Xiao Jie's hand. Pointing at Lin Qingyu, he said, "King Heng, Xie Min, what are you still doing? Do you believe his words? When the late emperor was seriously ill, the Empress Dowager and Lin Qingyu were the ones who stayed by his side. They were with the late emperor far more often and for far longer. They were the ones who forced the late emperor to write the edict!"

"You want to lay a hand on him? Then hurry up and stop talking rubbish." Wu Zhan rubbed his fists, "They wouldn't let me go to the Northwest to fight those Xixia barbarians and I've been suffocating from boredom! Ninth King, where did your soldiers come from? It's time to test their mettle."

King Heng looked back. The cavalry battalion and imperial guards had already formed an impenetrable ring around them. They outnumbered his soldiers

three to one. They were waiting at their ease for an exhausted enemy. They had no chance of winning.

At this point, the truth of the matter was no longer important. Being able to make it out of here alive took precedence over everything.

King Heng cleared his throat and said, “The late emperor was my brother and so of course, the late emperor’s last wish must come first—Xi Rong, Xiao Jie,

you two persecuted the prince first. You conspired to usurp the throne from behind. Even death cannot atone for your offense”

Xi Rong’s hands lowered slowly. His eyes were empty and his face held a deathly stillness.

Wu Zhan shook his head and clicked his tongue. “He certainly changes his stance faster than the weather.”

Xiao Jie grabbed Xi Rong’s arm. Choked up, he said, “A’Rong, A’Rong, please say something…”

“What else can we say?” Xi Rong said numbly, “The winner is the king, the loser is the emeny — A’Jie, we lost.”

“Ah? We’re not going to fight?” Wu Zhan said regretfully, “I was so excited for nothing.”

Xiao Jie said blankly, “Lost? What will happen now…will you die? I don’t want…” He rushed to Lin Qingyu. He wanted to grab onto Lin Qingyu’s clothes but then he met Lin Qingyu’s eyes. What would happen to his hands?

He didn't dare reach out. "Imperial Physician Lin, don't kill A'Rong, I beg you…please don't…"

Lin Qingyu slowly opened his lips. "You're begging me?"

Xiao Jie nodded like he was pounding garlic. "I'm begging you! I'm begging you…"

"If our military plan fails because this batch of provisions cannot reach the army, our men will be defeated by the Xixia." Lin Qingyu's voice trembled slightly, "Do you think the Xixia will spare the lives of those defeated soldiers?"

Xiao Jie suddenly froze. Wu Zhan sighed, "Provisions, oh provisions. No matter how powerful the general, he can't fight without provisions."

"I won't kill him right now." Lin Qingyu said, "I will keep him alive and when the Northwest Army triumphs, I will behead him as a sacrifice to Heaven."

Xiao Jie's eyes widened and he kept shaking his head, "No, no…"

Lin Qingyu walked to Xi Rong's side. In a voice that only the two of them could hear, "I gave you a choice. I told you that if you two didn't listen, I'll have someone else take your place. I wasn't kidding."

Xi Rong looked straight ahead. "If I hadn't done anything, once Gu Fuzhou

came back, I would have lost my life regardless. I don't regret it."

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "Not necessarily."

Xi Rong snorted lightly, obviously not believing what Lin Qingyu said. He finally looked at Xiao Jie, who had tears streaming down his face. He said softly, "Leave him alive. He doesn't understand anything."

Lin Qingyu made no comment. He raised his hand and two imperial guards stepped forward and took Xi Rong away.

Xiao Jie was heartbroken. Heedless of everything, he scrambled after him, "A'Rong!"

Wu Zhan blocked his way and asked Lin Qingyu, "Imperial Physician Lin, what should we do about the emp-… about him?"

Lin Qingyu said, "The emperor is tired. Help him back to the palace to rest."

Xie Min frowned. "Although the late emperor's decree was to protect the first crown prince's position, the previous crown prince has already passed from illness."

"Master Xie is right." King Heng said in a fair and just tone, "There is no one from the lineage of the late emperor who can inherit the throne and Xiao Jie, who conspired to usurp the throne, must not be allowed to continue to rule.

According to the Dayu's rules set by our ancestors, an heir can only be chosen from the clan."

Lin Qingyu said, "Did the Ninth King forget about King Huai?"

"Is this some kind of joke! King Huai is mentally incomplete. He is like a three-year-old child. How can he rule the country?"

"At least King Huai won't pretend to be smart. Moreover, he might not be without the possibility of a cure." Lin Qingyu changed the subject and said, "Matters in the Northwest are at a critical juncture. Today's matter must not be made known to the public. You are all pillars of the court. You should all know clearly what is to the people's benefit and what is not."

After this day, Emperor Chuxi said that he had taken ill and would not be attending court. Instead, he began to simply issue letters to instruct the court. The running of the government was left to his cabinet. In addition, Prime Minister Cui Lian made it clear that he wished to retire and after gaining the emperor's permission, he left, taking his family with him far, far from the capital. King Heng was also condemned to return to his fief, barred from entering the capital without an express order.

Lin Qingyu and Li Chan exhausted everything they had to send that batch of supplies. It should have supported the Northwest Army for a long time but now, only 20% was left. Li Chan was anxious to transfer more provisions to the northwest, but the roads were blocked by heavy snow. The original

journey of seven or eight days would take half a month and he didn't know whether it would be able to make it in time.

After eradicating the dissidents, this was supposed to be a time when he could relax a bit. But a layer of indescribable fear had settled over Lin Qingyu's heart. He was plagued by nightmares for several nights in a row.

In his dream, he was back in the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, standing in the courtyard of the Blue Wind Pavilion. He held a crimson umbrella, a vast expanse of snow under his feet. He saw the familiar wheelchair and Lu Wancheng seated in it, dressed in red. He was sleeping peacefully with his head down.

He stepped on the snow with bare feet, dragging the hem of his wedding dress. He walked towards Lu Wancheng, step after step, using the umbrella to shield against the falling snowflakes.

At this moment, Lu Wancheng's face suddenly turned into Gu Fuzhou's. He desperately stretched out his hand, the umbrella falling onto the snow-laden

ground. But no matter what he did, he couldn't reach the person in front of him.

Lin Qingyu sat up in shock. Huan Tong, who was on night duty, heard the movement and hurriedly brought a lamp over. "Young Master?"

Lin Qingyu was momentarily dazed. He raised his hand to touch the corners of his eyes, feeling a little bit of moisture. "Is it… snowing outside?"

"Yes. It's been snowing almost the entire night." Huan Tong said worriedly, "Young Master, are you alright?"

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes slowly. "I'm fine."

It has been half a month and he yet to receive another letter from Gu Fuzhou.

After a year of separation, no matter how deep the affection, only a solitary shadow was left wandering; their meetings confined only in dreams.

But now, he didn't even dare to dream.

Now past the twelfth lunar month, in the Northwest, the wind blew harder and the snow fell harder than it did in the capital. The army's ration and

fodder consumption increased day by day. The 20% provisions that Shen Huaishi desperately protected was only a drop in the bucket.

In order to stabilize the morale of the army, Gu Fuzhou concealed the fact that they had been robbed of their provisions. Apart from him and Shen Huaishi, only Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei knew about the supply shortage. On that day, Shen Huaishi, fighting one agains a hundred, managed to escape with 20% of the provisions. When he returned to camp, he was seriously injured. Fortunately, Hu Ji's miraculous skills brought him back from the brink. Gu Fuzhou originally wanted to send Shen Huaishi to a safe place to recuperate, but Shen Huaishi resolutely refused.

"Imperial Physician Lin asked me to follow and protect the general."

Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Why are you so obedient to my wife? Do you like him?"

Shen Huaishi hurriedly said, "I'm not – I don't! The General is the pillar of the country and I have admired you for a long time. Even without Imperial Physician Lin's order, I would have still chosen to serve the General."

Seeing Shen Huaishi so flustered, nearly jumping out to prove his innocence, Gu Fuzhou pushed him back on the bed. "I'm just kidding, take it easy. Even if

you like him anyway, I don't mind. There are many people who like him, but he……"

Only likes me.

Gu Fuzhou chuckled lightly and said, "I appreciate your kindness. Why don't you go somewhere safe and take care of yourself first? You can come back once you've fully recovered."

Shen Huaishi shook his head. "I want to stay in the Northwest to recuperate."

"What's so good about the Northwest? The chill wind is like a knife,. Each day here makes your looks age ten years."

Shen Huaishi was silent for a long time and said, "I have been to many places. My body is like duckweed and my life, like a piece of grass. Only in the Northwest have I felt really alive. I saw my brothers die in battle, in saw innocents die in vain. I realized that all those things in the past—whether it was Jingchun or Xiao Cheng — they're all ephemeral, like fleeting dreams."

The sudden moment of soul-baring made Gu Fuzhou raise his eyebrows. Shen Huaishi has been in the Northwest for a year and he's never mentioned the past nor did Gu Fuzhou ask about it. What surprised him the most was that

Shen Huaishi was able to mention Xiao Cheng's name so calmly. If his beautiful wife were present, he would surely be surprised as well.

"Since you mentioned Xiao Cheng, I have a question that I would like to ask you."

Shen Huaishi said, "Ask me anything, General."

Gu Fuzhou asked, "The fake death medicine that my wife gave you that day, have you used it?"

Shen Huaishi smiled slightly but kept silent.

Gu Fuzhou didn't ask any further questions, but just sighed, "Those who've left cannot be persuaded but those who come can still be pursued. If you want to stay, then stay. I'll call Youyuan and Shi Pei and let's think about what to do next." Patting Shen Huaishi on the shoulder, he opened the tent flap and walked out into the wind and snow.

Shen Huaishi looked down at his shoulder that Gu Fuzhou had just patted.

Talking to Gu Fuzhou was an extremely comfortable thing. He seemed to have a magical ability to pull people who are stuck in the quagmire back to the present world with a smile. Just like that day, when he came back riddled with wounds, Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei learned that their provisions had been stolen. One was furious, threatening to single-handedly break into the enemy camp to get their provisions back and the other was disappointed and

depressed. Only Gu Fuzhou, after a long silence, said in his usual lazy tone, “That’s enough. What’s done is done. There’s no use being angry. Anger will only make us lose our minds. None of those long faces now. How about I play the Xiqin for you and we’ll talk serious business after you calm down?”

In this world, only people like Gu Fuzhou can get to know intimately and spend a lifetime together with Imperial Physician Lin.

The author has something to say: The following chapters will be from Er Zhuang’s perspective~

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Chapter 97

Although they'd kept the supply shortage a secret, the soldiers inevitably began to whisper when they saw that the rice had turned to clear porridge, the steamed buns had become a little smaller and the firewood provided for heating during the night was not enough to last til daybreak. This was especially so among the veterans who had been in the Northwest last year. They'd experienced a shortage before, had stepped onto the battlefield hungry. Even if they did not fear death, they didn't want to die too aggrieved. At the very least, they can't die at the hands of their enemies unable to give it their all because they didn't have enough to eat.

Among the generals, Shi Pei had the best relationship with the common soldiers. Someone asked him if they were running out of provisions again. Shi Pei could only whip out his pre-prepared statement, "Everyone, relax. We have more than enough grain and fodder but the weather's getting colder and colder. The general is worried we'll find ourselves in the same situation as last year. The roads might be blocked by heavy snow which might prevent supplies

from reaching us. So, we thought to best prepare for any possible contingency and save supplies now."

However, this kind of rhetoric can only be used once or twice. If said too often, the soldiers would complain even more.

"Since there's enough provisions, why not take it out for the men to use? Two meals a day of this watery tasteless food barely enough to fill the gaps between our teeth! How are we supposed to practice when we haven't got enough food to eat!"

"And it's so damn cold at night. Standing at guard duty for half the night froze my face stiff."

"Us soldiers aside, if this keeps up, the horses won't be able to move."

…

Seeing the army's morale getting weaker and weaker, Wu Youyuan couldn't sit still. "If we continue to waste time like this, we're all going to waste away! In ancient times, armies only brought supplies enough for three days! If they didn't have enough, they fought. If they won, they looted for supplies; if they lost, it's still better than starving to death! We have enough supplies for more than just three days, why can't we fight!"

There was only one small brazier of firewood burning in the tent and the only place it could warm was the area immediately surrounding it. Gu Fuzhou has

been sitting beside it for a long time and still, only his hands had warmed up, his armor was still cold as ice. He had his chin resting on his palm, Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei's words, words they've been repeating countless times over the past few days, flooding into his ears.

Shi Pei shook his head, disagreeing, "General Xiao Wu, as you've said yourself, that was in ancient times. If you want to capture a city as big as Yongliang, you need at least ten times as many besiegers as defenders."

"General Shi, don't you think given how long we've been wearing out the Xixia, their current situation must be worse than ours. During the past few months, our army has repaired fortifications, we've surrounded them, cutting them off from aid. Everything's ready. If we continue to delay, the days will get

colder and colder. If the roads are blocked by heavy snow like last year, wouldn't we turn into an isolated force as well?"

"But given the current situation, even if we can capture Yongliang, I'm afraid the the casualties will be immeasurable…"

"There is no war without casualties." Wu Youyuan said in desperation, "General Shi must fear death, cravenly clinging so to life."

"Youyuan." Gu Fuzhou said, "Watch your words."

Wu Youyuan was startled; only then seeming to remember that Gu Fuzhou was sitting behind him. "The General was actually listening to us?"

Gu Fuzhou looked up at him. "Otherwise?"

"You were silent the whole time. I thought you were pondering something."

"Pondering matters whilst listening to discussions, doing two things at once is an essential skill for a general." Gu Fuzhou added some more firewood to the fire, "Your words were too much just now. Go and apologize to General Shi ."

Just as Wu Youyuan was about to apologize, Shi Pei smiled wryly and said, "I really am afraid of death. What I'm afraid of is for my brothers to die in vain.

Whether a general or a mess cook, they are all sons of their parents. Each is a living life…"

Wu Youyuan forgot about apologizing and retorted, "But if we don't accept these casualties now, there may be even more casualties in the future!"

Both Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei weren't people to stand on formality and they have a friendship formed from facing danger together. Quarreling inside and even outside the command tent was not unusual. So long as it wasn't excessive, Gu Fuzhou didn't pay them any mind.

The two were in the middle of such a fierce argument that they didn't even notice when Gu Fuzhou left. It was meal time in the army and there was a seemingly endless queue in front of the kitchen. Gu Fuzhou stopped behind the tent to observe secretly. He saw that everyone received only a bowl of gruel and a steamed bun about the size of Lin Qingyu's fist. It wasn't enough to eat in summer, let alone in this icy and snowy winter.

After receiving his steamed bun, one tall and robust soldier, instead of gobbling it up like the others, put the steamed buns into his iron mail. Gu

Fuzhou thought it a little strange and so he quietly followed behind the man. He went around tent after tent, finally arriving at the stables.

The man shouted, “Little Lin Zi!”

The young man who was feeding one of the horses turned around, a smile on his delicate face. “Jiang Dage!”

The man stuffed the steamed bun he had carried all the way here into the young man’s hands. “Quick, eat this while it’s hot.”

The young man glared at him. “It’s one steamed bun per person. I already ate mine. What will you eat? Here, take it back.”

The man refused to take it. “I’m not hungry so why should I eat? Didn’t I tell you that General Shi and I came from the same village. He’s looking after me. I just ate the two meat buns he gave me. I’m already full.”

“Liar. I can even hear your stomach growling…”

Gu Fuzhou was watching with relish, when suddenly a voice came from behind, “General.”

There was no one else capable of this kind of ghost-like movement except Shen Huaishi. Shen Huaishi’s injury had yet to fully heal but he couldn’t stay

idle and as soon as he managed to get out of bed, he was out and about doing what he could.

Gu Fuzhou didn't disturb Little Lin Zi and Jiang Dage and left quietly with Shen Huaishi. "What's the matter, Little Shenzi?"

Shen Huaizhi was momentarily stunned. He said, "We have a report from the scouts. The road from Guangyang to Yongliang has been blocked by heavy snow. The supply wagons can't get through. People will have to carry it through load by load."

Gu Fuzhou looked back at the two people in the stable. He chuckled lightly and said helplessly, "What bad luck. Looks like I…really have no other choice."

Gu Fuzhou was obviously smiling but Shen Huaishi's chest inexplicably tightened. "General?"

"Let's go." Gu Fuzhou said, "Let's see if Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei are done arguing."

In the tent, the debate between Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei was still going strong. Gu Fuzhou picked up the Xiqin he had brought with him from the capital.

Casually plucking a few strings, the Xiqin made a shrill sound. The two finally closed their mouths and looked towards Gu Fuzhou.

Gu Fuzhou's tone was the same as usual. "Let the soldiers eat their fill for the next two days. After these two days, rally the troops to attack the city."

Wu Youyuan and Shi Pei had two completely different expressions on their faces. Wu Youyuan was overjoyed and left in a hurry after saying "I'll make the preparations now". Shi Pei kept making to speak but stopping. Gu Fuzhou guessed what he was going to say. He said, "Wu Youyuan is right. We will

inevitably have to attack the city. If this continues to drag on, the casualties will be far worse."

Shi Pei said in a solemn voice, "Since the General has made up his mind, I will obey your orders."

"Don't worry too much." Gu Fuzhou comforted him, "I have an idea. Maybe I can recover Yongliang while also minimizing casualties."

Shi Pei's eyes lit up. "What trick does the General have up his sleeve?"

"It's not some brilliant scheme." Gu Fuzhou said, selling the climax of the story, "You'll know when the time comes but I really hope I won't need it."

On this day, the snow that had been falling for several days finally stopped. Under the clear moonlight, the barracks seemed to be the same as usual; at the same time, it seemed to be a little quieter.

Gu Fuzhou was laying in bed, reading Lin Qingyu's letters for the one hundred and eighth time by the dim light of the fire. A large part of Lin Qingyu's letters

was about the situation in the capital. Occasionally, there would be responses to his written words of love.

He wrote to Lin Qingyu: Do you know those dice with red seeds, like this lovesickness made bone-deep?

Lin Qingyu replied to him. I do. Everything in the capital is fairly stable but Xiao Jie is so stupid that it bothers me.

He wrote in reply to Lin Qingyu: Then replace him — No, that's not it. Doctor Lin, I have been waiting for your reply for a month and all you give me in reply is "I do"? At the very least, you should say that you miss me.

Lin Qingyu replied to him: Before we recover Yongliang, I don't want to make any moves against these two. I miss you.

He began to play little tricks: What part of me do you miss? What do you want to do with me? You can say a little more than that, Doctor Lin. I'd love to hear it.

Lin Qingyu replied to him: Xi Rong is dissatisfied with being controlled. He's making repeated provocations. I am at the end of my patience.

He replied, depressed: Why do you have to put up with him? Just end him. I didn't leave you so many people to let them see you be so wronged. And

Baobei, you didn't reply to my sweet words from my last letter. If you still don't reply this time, I'm going to make a fuss.

Lin Qingyu: I want to have sex with you, are you satisfied now? Of course, I'm putting up with him for you and the Northwest. But Xi Rong has already secretly wooed the prime minister and King Heng to his side. The Tianji Camp is also under his control. I'm afraid I'm in no position to make the first move. These two incomparably idiotic fools.

…

Looking at Lin Qingyu's upright and elegant handwriting, Gu Fuzhou could clearly make out this great beauty who was obviously extremely angry and yet had to maintain his composure. Without him, no matter how upset Lin Qingyu was, there would be no one to coax him. He wondered how pitiful and helpless Lin Qingyu was. Then, while being pitiful and helpless, he would go

on to do bad things, making the people who've offended him even more pitiful and helpless.

It's a pity he couldn't see it. What a shame. If this long-distance relationship continues, his first kiss will come back.

"General!" Wu Youyuan's voice preceded his arrival, "I have researched a never before seen brand new formation! Even the Xixia's demon commander might not be able to break through this formation!"

Gu Fuzhou stuffed the letters under his pillow and said perfunctorily, "That's amazing. You came at just the right time. Come with me and let's admire the moon."

Wu Youyuan couldn't understand. "The General is still in a mood to admire the moon at a time like this? A great battle is before us. What we should be doing is looking at these formations."

"You're too nervous, Youyuan." Gu Fuzhou smiled, "Even if it is moonlight before a great battle, we mustn't let it down." He walked out of the tent, sat

down by the tent flap and patted the empty spot beside him, “Come and sit, admire the moon with me and we’ll take a look at your formation afterwards.”

Wu Youyuan was about to refuse and Gu Fuzhou added, “This is an order.”

Wu Youyuan sat down begrudgingly next to Gu Fuzhou. Gu Fuzhou asked him, “How does the bright moon in the Northwest compare to the Capital?”

Wu Youyuan looked up. “Aren’t they the same?”

Gu Fuzhou shook his head and sighed with a smile, “What a boring straight man.” He watched the moon quietly for a while and then suddenly said, “Youyuan, if I am unfortunately captured…”

Wu Youyuan hastily interrupted, “General, please don’t say such words. The General has planned everything. Our army will win this battle!”

“No need to get so agitated.” Gu Fuzhou said with a smile, “I mean just in case…”

Wu Youyuan said resolutely, “There will be no ‘just in case’ s .”

When Zhao Mingwei was defeated in Yongliang and captured by the enemy, he swung his knife and killed himself without the slightest hesitation. Those who venerated the General could be killed but could not be humiliated. General Gu

must think so too. If he ever falls into the hands of the enemy, he would never give them the opportunity to humiliate him.

Gu Fuzhou said leisurely, “I just want to say that if I am unfortunately captured…you must come and save me.”

Wu Youyuan was stunned. “Huh?”

“I promised that Imperial Physician Lin that I wouldn’t die, I wrote him a letter of guarantee.” Gu Fuzhou stretched out his hand, watching the clear light fall onto his palm. His lips curved into a smile, “So, no matter what happens, please, you must find a way to save me—please.”

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Chapter 98

After listening to Gu Fuzhou's words, Wu Youyuan's mood became a little heavy. The general had mentioned his wife, the stunning imperial physician. He had seen Imperial Physician Lin and thought he must be some immortal who stepped out of a storybook. At this moment, he was excited about the upcoming battle but Imperial Physician Lin must be worried about his husband.

It must be the same for the relatives of all the other soldiers.

Shi Pei was afraid of death; he was afraid of his brothers dying. General Gu did not want to die because he had written a letter of guarantee to his wife.

Wu Youyuan thought of his own family. When he left the capital, his mother packed his luggage for him with eyes rimmed red; his elderly grandfather sent

him out of the city by himself. Though he said nothing when they parted, the hand that patted him on the shoulder had been trembling.

“I can’t die either.” Wu Youyuan stood up abruptly and said loudly, “None of us can die!”

Gu Fuzhou was startled and said with a smile, “Why are you so fired up all of a sudden?”

“General Shi is right. Whether it’s a general or a cook, we are all sons of our parents. Each life we can save matters.”

Gu Fuzhou nodded in satisfaction. “Not bad. You now understand. This month has not been spent in vain.”

Wu Youyuan clenched his fists tightly. His whole body was brimming with fighting spirit. “So General, now is not the time to be admiring the moon.

Please quickly help me look over the formation. With this formation, our army may be able to fight one to ten. It will greatly minimize our casualties."

Gu Fuzhou grabbed Wu Youyuan's arm and used him as support to stand up. "I'm a little hungry. Go to the kitchen and bring two bowls of noodles. We'll look it over while we eat."

"Yes, I'll go now!"

When provisions are in short supply, this meager fare of plain noodles are exotic and luxurious delicacies. Gu Fuzhou has been eating steamed buns like all the other soldiers. The little Gu worms at home must be eating better than he was.

Gu Fuzhou was looking forward to this happiness-bringing noodles. He didn't expect for Wu Youyuan to come back, not only empty-handed but with his

face painted with anger; and it was a subtle kind of anger, as though he was shamed into anger.

Gu Fuzhou opened the water bag to drink. “What’s wrong?”

“When I went to the kitchen just now, I saw two soldiers in the dark, do-doing…” Wu Youyuan said, rushing to get it out, “Doing that cut-sleeve thing!”

Gu Fuzhou almost spit out his mouthful of water. Full of admiration and envy, he said, “Not bad.” It felt like ten years since he’s done ‘that cut-sleeve thing’. He’s almost forgotten what it was like to have a beauty in his arms.

“The barracks is a solemn place. These two men must be severely punished for their debauchery!”

Gu Fuzhou asked, “Does military law state that you can’t do the cut-sleeve thing in the barracks?”

“It does!”

“Then how does it say to deal with it?”

“By beheading them!”

Gu Fuzhou let out an “Oh”. He said, “Where are those two now? Bring them

here. I'll take a look."

Not long after, the two men who'd been outrageously bold in their lust, with arms tied behind their backs and ropes looked around their necks, were brought before Gu Fuzhou. Gu Fuzhou felt that the two looked familiar and after a closer look, it turned out that they were Jiang Dage and Little Linzi, the two who exchanged steamed buns that day.

Both of them had their heads lowered but even when they were brought before General Gu, neither of them begged for mercy. Gu Fuzhou saw that their

clothes were neat and tidy. He motioned Wu Youyuan to approach him and whispered, “Didn’t you say that they were doing the cut-sleeve thing?”

“Yes, I saw it with my own eyes.”

“What exactly were they doing?”

“The tall one kissed the short one on the forehead.”

Gu Fuzhou: “…”

“General,” Jiang Dage said in a rough voice, “I forced Little Linzi. If you want to behead someone, behead me alone.”

Little Linzi, who was trembling with fright, suddenly had the courage to speak, “No, no, Jiang Dage didn’t force me. I did it voluntarily.”

Gu Fuzhou glanced at Wu Youyuan, the look in his eyes was quite subtle. “What do you think should be done?”

Wu Youyuan said, “Of course it should be dealt with according to military law!”

Jiang Dage didn’t change his tune, “If the General wants my life, I have no complains. But I will be in the frontlines for the siege two days hence. I wish to

die at that time, I ask that the General grant this request!”

Gu Fuzhou and Wu Youyuan looked at each other. During a siege, it is nearly impossible for those who at the very forefront to survive. But when recovering a city, there has to be one soldier who’s first to make it over the wall.

Little Linzi must have known about this a long time ago. He was not too surprised but he sobbed uncontrollably.

Jiang Dage knew that his death was approaching, so in order not to leave any regrets, he chose to break the military order and express his heart to his sweetheart. Unexpectedly, he had just kissed the other’s forehead when he was grabbed by Wu Youyuan who happened to be passing by. This reminded Gu

Fuzhou of his school days when the principal would go around the playground with a flashlight, trying to catch couples making out.

After a while of silence, Gu Fuzhou asked, “What’s your name?”

Jiang Dage said, “Jiang Shiyue.”

Little Linzi said, “Li-Lin Lan.”

Gu Fuzhou appeared thoughtful and then, he suddenly smiled, “It’s settled. You will definitely not die tomorrow.”

Jiang Shiyue was surprised and asked, “Ah? Why?”

“Because you have such nice sounding names. In the Dayu, people with nice names will definitely live a long time.”

Jiang Shiyue was a little confused and asked, “The General won’t kill me tonight?”

“I won’t. The both of you go back and rest.” Gu Fuzhou said, “Xiao Linzi, spend the last day before the battle with your Jiang Dage well. Twenty-four hours, not a second less.”

Jiang Shi was overjoyed, “Thank you, General. If after two days, I can survive, I

will…"

"Shhh." Gu Fuzhou put his index finger on his mouth and instructed earnestly, "It is absolute taboo to say such things before an attack. So, don't say those kind of things anymore."

Jiang Shiyue couldn't understand what the general meant, but he did as the general said. He kowtowed again and led Lin Lan back.

After walking away, Lin Lan couldn't help asking, "Jiang Dage, what did you want to say just now? If you survive…"

Now that it was his sweetheart asking, Jiang Shiyue forgot the general's warning, "If I survive, I will go to your family to propose marriage after the war is over. I heard from a brother from the capital that there are now a lot of men who marry male wives. Even our great General married a male beauty."

Lin Lan smiled with tears in his eyes. "That's great."

Two days later, the Dayu ordered their troops to attack the city. No matter how loudly they called the Xixia to battle, the Xixia Army stood firm and did

not fight. Yongliang was well-defended with its thick gates and walls thirteen meters high.

Gu Fuzhou sat astride Xiao Hei, Shi Pei and Wu Youyuan leading troops to either side of him. He had seen the gates of Yongliang countless times but it was the first time he realized just how high it was.

Banners were fluttering in the wind, the battle drums resounded. The general gave the order and the soldiers raised their arms and let out a shout. The soldiers headed straight for Yongliang.

At almost the same moment, thousands of arrows were fired from the top of the city walls. A rain of arrows poured down. The infantry rushing to the front struggled and fell, while the cavalry coming from behind stepped on the corpses of those that came before them. Immediately afterwards, they were knocked down by the second wave of arrows, their bodies buried in the surging tide of people.

When they finally set the ladder against the walls, the besiegers were greeted by boulders rolling down from high above.

After this day, Gu Fuzhou never saw Jiang Shiyue again. He only saw Lin Lan, alone in a corner, gnawing on a steamed bun and weeping silently. In two days, he wouldn't even see Lin Lan.

For several days in a row, they failed to breach Yongliang's defenses. The morale of the army was greatly reduced and their provisions was reaching its

limit. In the barracks, wounded soldiers moaning in pain could be seen everywhere. Since the siege, Hu Ji couldn't remember when he's last closed his eyes to rest. Still, more and more wounded soldiers came.

"This is normal when laying siege to a city, especially a big city like Yongliang. Back then, Emperor XX took a full year and eight months laying siege to Luoyang City. In the end, didn't he succeed?" Wu Youyuan kept encouraging the group, "The enemy will run out of arrows and boulders. As long as we hold on, the day we break into the city is within sight!"

Gu Fuzhou sounded exhausted, "I have no doubt we will capture Yongliang. The problem is, the Xixia's Demon Commander doesn't doubt it either. He knows he can't hold Yongliang."

Wu Youyuan asked, "If he knows he can't hold it, why doesn't he open the gates and surrender already? Why put up this desperate struggle?"

"If I were him, since I'm going to lose Yongliang sooner or later, I'm going to make the loss worth it."

Shi Pei asked, "Then, what does the General think would make it worth it?"

"Dayu's troops and riches, siege equipment or… me." Gu Fuzhou said calmly, "For the Xixia, nothing is more valuable than Gu Fuzhou's life. In the eyes of the enemy, having failed to take down Yongliang after so long and facing dwindling supplies, it is only reasonable that we withdraw our troops temporarily. If I pretend to withdraw and lure the enemy out of the city to lay

an ambush on us, even if the Demon Commander knows it is a trick, he will take the bait. — After all, if Yongliang is about to be lost, they will surely die once the city's defenses fail. Wouldn't it be nice if the general who killed their prince died with them?"

They all looked at each other and Shi Pei said, "The General wants… use himself as bait?" The last four words stuck in Shi Pei's throat for a long time before he could say them.

"No!" Wu Youyuan said, agitated, "I would rather we all die in battle than let the General risk himself!"

Gu Fuzhou made a "tsk" sound. "And not long ago, I said that you'd finally understood." Looking at it now, it seems he hasn't understood anything.

"Please reconsider, General." Shi Pei frowned, "The Xixia is at the end of their strength and won't last for long. Why do you…"

"You think I want to do this. We don't have much food left, Dage. We can't last long either." Seeing the same expression on everyone's faces, Gu Fuzhou smiled and said, "Strictly speaking, I'm not actually forfeiting my life. —— Come here."

The people moved in closer. Gu Fuzhou pointed to a point on the map, and said, "The terrain here is like the mouth of a gourd. When the time comes, I will lead the enemy troops here, and Wu Youyuan will lead a thousand cavalry

from the other mountain pass. We'll bolt the door and beat those dogs. Even if the enemy grows wings, it would be difficult for them to fly away."

Shi Pei pondered for a long time and said, "But, just in case… General, if you want to lure the enemy, I shall take your place!"

"Your courage is worthy of recognition, but with all due respect, your life is not worth much to the Xixia and it won't be enough to make them fight to the death. Don't worry, I believe Youyuan will come to save me." Gu Fuzhou stood under the dappled light and shadow. He smiled and said, "Youyuan, will you allow me to place my trust in you?"

Wu Youyuan's Adam's apple bobbed up and down. "General…"

"I'll go with the General." Shen Huaishi said, "I promised Imperial Physician Lin that I would protect you."

Gu Fuzhou thought for a while and said, "You can go but only if Hu Ji thinks your body is strong enough to go to the battlefield."

Shen Huaishi immediately said, "I can."

In the next two days, Dayu's attacks gradually weakened and the Xixia were able to take a short respite.

Since he wanted to pretend to withdraw his troops, he naturally couldn't withdraw openly during the daytime. Xixia's Demon Commander always kept

Gu Fuzhou in his sights. If Gu Fuzhou could not be found, he would definitely not act rashly. Gu Fuzhou ordered his subordinates to carry their packs and divide into three groups to leave. He led one of them to the mountain pass bottleneck, the location they had agreed upon in advance.

Gu Fuzhou got on Xiao Hei. Staring out into the boundless night, he suddenly found his heart beating a little fast. “It’s over.”

Shen Huaishi, following behind him, hurriedly asked, “What’s the matter, General?”

“It’s nothing.” Gu Fuzhou chuckled softly, “I’m just a little…”

Just a little scared.

But right now, he was Gu Fuzhou, the invincible commander general, the Dayu’s renowned god of war. Gu Fuzhou would never be afraid, so he cannot be afraid; at least in front of these soldiers who trusted him. He cannot be afraid.

He thought of Lin Qingyu.

It would be great if Lin Qingyu were here. If his wife were by his side, he could place his arms around the other’s waist and complain unscrupulously. He was so tired, his worries keeping him up day after day. He didn’t want to lead the

army. He didn't want to fight. He just wanted to be a salted fish, a salted fish who clings to Lin Qingyu all day long.

But he was Gu Fuzhou and Gu Fuzhou should stand majestically, with spear held straight, full of mettle. He's tried his best. He hoped he wouldn't disappoint his men.

Gu Fuzhou took a deep breath and comforted himself, "There is nothing to be afraid of. I have planned everything." He heard himself say, "I am not afraid at all."

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Chapter 99

When Gu Fuzhou reached the outer gate of the barracks, it was snowing lightly. This was undoubtedly his most peaceful launch into battle. There were no golden war drums, no shouts and cheers, not even the sound of flags whipping in the wind.

Gu Fuzhou and his group walked in a subdued manner, with no one to see them off. Shi Pei and Wu Youyuan led their respective troops, the former to

attack the city, the latter to set up an ambush. The remaining generals guarded the camp.

They rode slowly towards Zhuo County, following the planned route, leaving a line of horseshoe prints on the snow.

A lieutenant said, “It’s so quiet, I’m not used to it.”

Gu Fuzhou said casually, “Huaishi should be very used to this kind of quiet.”

“That’s right, Shen Xiongdi used to be a shadow guard. You must have carried out most of your missions in the dead of night.”

Shen Huaishi smiled and nodded. The lieutenant asked again, “Then can you see very far and clearly at night?”

“Yes, seeing at night is a must-have skill for a shadow guard.”

“It’s a pity that the enemy doesn’t have such good eyes.” Gu Fuzhou said, “Let everyone light the torches. If reinforcements from the Xixia come, it’s best to attract them together.”

In the silent night, ‘beacons’ were lit up along the winding mountain road, as if to announce their location to the enemy. Anyone with a functioning brain could see that they intended to attract their attention. But the Xixia army,

having been trapped in the surrounded city for so many days, despite knowing it was a trap, would have no choice but to jump into it.

This was only because Gu Fuzhou was the bait for this trap, the Dayu's exalted god of war who beheaded their crown prince and killed countless Xixia soldiers. Instead of starving to death, or being captured after they've taken the city, it was better to fight to the death and drag Gu Fuzhou to hell with them. Zhao Mingwei was dead and once Gu Fuzhou was dead, there would be no general within the Dayu's army who could stop the Xixia from occupying the Central Plains.

Gu Fuzhou led the troops to mouth of the gourd. Still, there was no movement around them. And the quieter it is, the more it signified the coming of danger. The snow fell down heavier, fluttering down onto every bow and blade.

Not long after, there was the thundering sound of hooves fast approaching, making the ground tremble faintly. Just by the deafening noise, one could tell how many people were coming.

The lieutenant general couldn't help but wonder, "Why do they still have so many people? Could it be that they left no one to guard the city?"

Gu Fuzhou was not surprised. "Since they know they can't hold it, why even bother?"

As expected of the demon commander, being able to bring such a number of cavalry out of Yongliang without anyone noticing. By this time, Shi Pei must

have already taken advantage of the enemy leaving to enter the city. The more enemy troops here, the less there was in Yongliang.

“Do not panic,” Gu Fuzhou reassured everyone, “Even if they come out in full force, they won’t be our opponents. It’s better for them to come together, so that we don’t have to spend time chasing the stranglers.”

The sound of pounding horse hooves was getting closer and closer. When he looked up, he saw the black armored cavalry coming like a flood, setting off bursts of snow. Shortly after, there were battle cries everywhere, the cold glint of swords shone beneath the moonlight.

Shen Huaishi said, “General, don’t underestimate the enemy. These men are already dead soldiers. Once you no longer fear death, you can do anything.”

Gu Fuzhou nodded. He tightened the reins and said, “Pass down the order. Fight and advance, lead them to the mouth of the bottleneck.”

The cold wind was howling, querulous and plaintive. The valley filled with the piercing sound of swords clashing against swords. The strong smell of blood assaulted their nostrils. The naked blade was splashed with blood. The

crimson color blotted out the sky and sun. It was as though only this lone color was left in the entire world.

When they've led the enemy troop into the bottleneck, there was sudden movement, ten times stronger than the movement just now. The lieutenant was overjoyed. "It must be General Wu leading the ambush—"

Shen Huaishi stared into the distance, and said in a low voice, "No, it's—"

His voice stopped abruptly. The lieutenant's eyes went wide and the smile on his face was replaced by shock. "It's the Xixia. Xixia's reinforcements have arrived!"

The charging horses made a rumbling sound, several times stronger than the one earlier, sending snow and mud tumbling, setting off waves of snow several feet high.

"This is a good thing." Gu Fuzhou pretended to be relaxed, "With Xixia's reinforcements here, it proves that Yongliang is safe. Their reinforcements have made a difficult trek while he we have been waiting at leisure for our

weary enemies. In their state, we could match them one to five, much more so with one to two."

Seeing Gu Fuzhou was so calm, the other people's hearts were also relieved. The lieutenant shouted, "Brothers, rush in. General Wu is waiting for us past the bottleneck!"

It was just as Gu Fuzhou expected. The Xixia's reinforcements came in a hurry, running through hundreds of miles of ice and snow, more than half their physical strength already sapped. Yet, despite knowing that the odds were slim, they still insisted on coming.

They had no intention of winning this battle, nor did they intent to hold onto Yongliang. The only thing they wanted was Gu Fuzhou's life, even if they exchanged the lives of tens of thousands of Xixia's soldiers for it.

Shen Huaishi quickly realized something was wrong. "General, there must be many assassins with high martial arts skills among these reinforcements and they will all be targeting you."

Gu Fuzhou sighed helplessly, "They've certainly gone all out just for my head."

"General, please stay close to me. I won't let Xixia's assassins get close to you." As soon as Shen Huaizhi finished speaking, his brows suddenly furrowed even

tighter. He looked down and saw his own previous injury. He hurriedly looked back up and focused on the enemy.

Dayu's army fought and fell back, finally leading them into the bottleneck. But the ambush they were expecting didn't come.

"What's going on?" The lieutenant returned to Gu Fuzhou after going a round delivering death, "Where is General Wu?!"

Gu Fuzhou's face was solemn. He looked at the snow covered mountaintops on both his left and right. Finally, he couldn't help but swear, "F*ck."

"It's an avalanche." Shen Huaishi whispered, "General Wu has been delayed by an avalanche."

It wasn't only them. The rest of the troops were anxious as to why the ambush hadn't arrived. But a sword had no eyes and a moment's distraction could cost them their lives.

"Just a bit of bad luck, my brothers. But it doesn't matter, Wu Youyuan must be trying to find a way to come here. We just need to hold on until he gets here." Gu Fuzhou suddenly smiled, wanton and brash, "We have beautiful lands before us and beauties ever so delicate—It would be a damn pity if we were to die here."

After saying so, Gu Fuzhou snatched the lieutenant's bow and arrow and aimed at a general of the opposing army. He drew the bow and set the arrow

without any hesitation.

The arrow streak through the air like a meteor across the sky. Though they couldn't see where it landed, this arrow was like a signal and the soldiers rose up in response, no longer concerned about where their ambushing comrades were, they rushed in for close combat, killing everyone that stood before them.

In order to make the enemy think that they had a fighting chance, Gu Fuzhou had only brought three thousand cavalry with him. Without Wu Youyuan's ambush, they were greatly outnumbered; still, no one hesitated. They believed that the ambush would arrive and the only thing they had to do was to hold on.

For the first time, Gu Fuzhou, who had always been strategizing in the rear, stood solidly on the battlefield. The sharp point of the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear reappeared after three years. Wasn't it just killing people? This was something he had already mastered.

The fighting went from dark to dawn, from heavy snow to the ceasing of snowfall, from a majestic charge to corpses strewn on the battlefield. The cavalry troops before Gu Fuzhou fell down one by one. Of the 3000 cavalry, only thirty remained.

Gu Fuzhou's Xiao Bai had already died in a rain of arrows. Like the rest of the soldiers, dressed in iron armor, armed with a spear, he faced the remaining

hundreds of enemy soldiers. But it didn't matter, soon —Wu Youyuan was coming soon.

They had to just wait. Wait.

Suddenly, Shen Huaishi caught a glimpse of a ghostly figure approaching silently. He stepped out resolutely and slit the enemy's throat with a dagger.

He had used his skills too abruptly, pulling at old injuries and so he had to pause briefly. During this very short moment, a cold arrow flew from behind him, heading straight for Gu Fuzhou.

Shen Huaizhi shouted. "General!"

Gu Fuzhou heard Shen Huaishi's shout but he didn't stop what he'd been doing, swinging his spear to block a sword for a soldier.

A burst of severe pain hit and before Gu Fuzhou could realize what happened, he saw Shen Huaishi running towards him, face pale. He then slowly lowered

his head and looked at the arrow piercing his chest. A corner of his lips pulled up belatedly.

No one can win every battle. He's won so many by sheer luck and in the end, it's still through sheer luck that he lost.

Immediately after, a second arrow then a third… arrows flew towards Gu Fuzhou from all directions.

The Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear stood tall, heavily planted in the snow, supporting its master to stand tall until Shen Huaishi came and supported the collapsing Gu Fuzhou.

Gu Fuzhou's face, at ease all the time, finally showed a trace of fear.

It was not death that he feared. He had died twice, he's had experience. Death was nothing for him to fear.

What he feared was Lin Qingyu being forced to face his death.

This fear even overshadowed the physical pain. I'm sorry, from the very beginning, he wasn't some great general protecting the country nor was he any

sort of amazing hero. At this critical moment of life and death, the only thing he thought of was Lin Qingyu.

At this time, he vaguely heard someone shout. “A great victory in Yongliang ——A great victory in Yongliang!”

General Wu had arrived!

Shen Huaishi, who fought tirelessly all night, was finally able to put down his long sword. He held Gu Fuzhou’s hand tightly. He saw Gu Fuzhou laugh and say, “It hurts so much.”

It hurt more than the previous two times.

Shen Huaishi was a martial artist and has found himself repeatedly on the verge of death but he has never felt so helpless. He hated his stupid mouth for not even being able to say a word of comfort.

Gu Fuzhou’s mouth overflowed with blood and he asked, “I seem to have heard… we won?”

“Yes.” Shen Huaishi tried to force a smile, “We won, we won.”

“Then, can you save me? I…I can’t die.” Gu Fuzhou leaned on Shen Huaishi, his eyes widened and he practically begged, with no regard for dignity, “He’s still

waiting for me. I'll gave him a letter of guarantee. I can't lie to him… Don't let me die, he will cry."

Shen Huaishi was already sobbing. "I'll save you, General. Just hold on, Doctor Hu must be on his way, I'll take you to find him."

Vaguely hearing the word "doctor", the corners of Gu Fuzhou's mouth raised slightly. He wanted to say something but suddenly he let out an "ugh" and vomited a large mouthful of blood. Even with Shen Huaishi's support, he couldn't hold on anymore and his body slowly slid down.

"General!" Shen Huaizhi knelt down in the snow and wrapped Gu Fuzhou into his arms. He used his hand to cover Gu Fuzhou's wound, blood seeping from between his fingers, dripping ceaselessly into the snow, blooming a winter's peach blossom forest, out of season but warm as spring.

No matter how hard he tried, Gu Fuzhou's blood still flowed more and more.

It wouldn't stop, couldn't stop, won't stop.

Gu Fuzhou's vision gradually blurred. A great weight pressed against his chest and he couldn't breathe. Every breath was a heart-piercing pain. The bleeding

seemed to have taken the warmth from his body; his body growing colder and colder; the cold piercing to his bones.

Was he…was he going to die again?

He lied to Lin Qingyu. He was going to die and he couldn't go back.

If he had known it would end this same way, he shouldn't have confessed to Lin Qingyu, shouldn't have kissed him, shouldn't have dirtied him. He'd made

Lin Qingyu sad once and now, he was going to hurt him a second time. He was a despicable man.

He knew Lin Qingyu well. Lin Qingyu would never be able to forget him and Lin Qingyu wouldn't do something so stupid as to die for love. He would continue living; cold, callous, throwing away any sort of feeling.

If only… if only Lin Qingyu could forget — forget about these past years, forget about him, maybe he can live a happier life. If there was a drug to fake death, surely there was a drug to induce amnesia.

After all, his wish was for Lin Qingyu to be happy forever.

Since he was seventeen til now, it has always been thus.

Hmm… his eyelids were so heavy. This dark dizziness was similar to last time's. He remembered that at that time, Lin Qingyu hadn't stopped him from closing his eyes. Then this time, can't he also——

"General!" Shen Huaishi choked up and he shouted, "General, hold on! Doctor Hu will be here soon. Don't close your eyes! Imperial Physician Lin—Lin Qingyu is still waiting for you!"

Gu Fuzhou's eyes suddenly opened wide and the hand holding Shen Huaishi's gained strength.

If he just keeps his eyes open, he will definitely be rescued. He just has to wait

until the doctor comes and then they'll fix him.

A Lin Qingyu who forgets all about him won't be happy either. Lin Qingyu will only be happy only if he's alive.

So he can't die…he has to live.

With his efforts, his field of vision cleared once again. He saw a ray of light, a ray of light piercing the clouds. He murmured softly, "Dawn?"

Shen Huaishi nodded with tears streaming down his face. "Yes, it's dawn."

"That's great." Bad things usually happen at night and dawn is always a symbol of hope. Maybe he was really going to be saved. As long as he doesn't close his eyes, he can make it through.

Like this, Gu Fuzhou kept staring at the beam of light. Filled with unwillingness and nostalgia, his motionless eyes, reflected the light.

"General… General!"

Then, the last gleam of light disappeared from Gu Fuzhou's eyes. In the past, these smiling eyes that used to be as bright as a star, was now filled only with

infinite stillness.

But his eyes remained open.

——Early into the third year of Chuxi, Gu Fuzhou waited a long time for reinforcements as outside Yongliang, grief-stricken, with ten thousand arrows piercing his heart, he died.

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Chapter 100

As soon as Wu Youyuan arrived with the ambush, the Xixia were immediately defeated. In other words, Xixia had lost all fighting spirit the moment Gu Fuzhou fell. Their goal achieved, the Xixia had immediately begun to fall back. The Dayu's iron cavalry chased after them, every soldier's eyes red. Their commander was captured alive and the troops were slaughtered.

After this one single night, a river of blood wound through the valley. At the same moment, Shi Pei hung the Dayu's banner over the walls of Yongliang. Finally, Yongliang, this northwest fortress, had returned to the Dayu.

In the last battle, the Dayu regained Yongliang and drove the heavily injured Xixia to the northern frontier. They killed tens of thousands of their enemies but the cost to them was only 3,000 of their cavalry. It was a great victory but not the slightest hint of joy could be seen among the troops in the Northwest Army's camp.

Against the howling cold wind, white flags were hung; the ashes of paper money wafted through the air. The light of fires reflected against everyone's pale and mournful faces. Wu Youyuan knelt in front of Gu Fuzhou's tablet for an entire day and a night; he ate nothing and drank nothing. He gripped tightly the sword hung around his waist. His eyes were bloodshot. He experienced self-blame, grief and indignation but more so than anything, murderous intent. If Shi Pei hadn't stopped him, he would have chased the Xixia to their very

capital. He would have razed the country to the ground. He would have taken the head of Xixia's emperor to serve as a sacrifice to General Gu's departed spirit.

From this moment on, this was to be his life-long desire.

Shen Huaishi changed out of his armor and dressed in a light attire. He entered the tent. He looked at Gu Fuzhou's memorial tablet. His Adam's apple bobbed and forcibly holding onto his composure, burned three sticks of incense. Shi Pei handed him an urgent report and said, voice hoarse. "I am sorry to have to trouble you with this matter, Shen Xiongdi."

Heavy snow blocked the way back to the capital and the fastest cavalryman in the army couldn't beat Shen Huaishi. By the time Shen Huaishi returns to the capital with the battle report and news of Gu Fuzhou's death, it will be half a month later.

The latest report about the Northwest that Qinzheng Hall had was also from half a month ago. According to the report, the defenses of Yongliang were solid, the enemy army refused to come out and and the Northwest Army's attacks have proved ineffective. Moreover, the provisions from Guangyang to Yongliang have been blocked by heavy snow. Their supplies were in dire straits the army's morale was sinking.

The dragon throne beside the dragon desk had been removed, replaced by an old-fashioned wooden armchair. Xiao Songzi walked into the hall with tea to

see Lin Qingyu sitting upon this armchair, forehead resting on his hand; his thick feather-like eyelashes cast pale shadows on his cheeks.

Xiao Songzi thought that Lin Qingyu was asleep and so he made sure to lighten his footsteps. Ever since the emperor's "sudden illness", he has been recuperating in his bedchambers, setting not a single foot into Qinzheng Hall. Now, Lin Qingyu has become half the master of Qinzheng Hall. Under the order of the emperor, he reviewed reports here, met with the nobles and ministers and discussed state affairs. A chief assistant far superior than any.

Lin Qingyu was so brazenly and unscrupulously coercing the emperor and ordering about the officials. To call him thief and traitor would not be an exaggeration. But seeing the imperial guards and the iron cavalry battalion all over the palace, no one dared speak out. Unable to see the emperor, the officials could only ask to see the empress dowager. The empress dowager said, "Aijia is getting old. Governing from behind the curtain, I often find

myself unable to do as much as I wish. It is a good thing that there is Imperial Physician Lin to help relieve Aijia's worries."

"But Master Lin is still nothing more than an imperial physician. For a mere imperial physician to manage the government and order about the ministers is simply unheard of. It is a disgrace to our great Dayu!"

"I thank you for reminding Aijia." The empress dowager said lightly, "In your opinion, what sort of official position should Aijia bestow upon him?"

…

Since Cui Lian retired and returned to his hometown, the position of prime minister has remained vacant. Some people say that it won't be long before Lin Qingyu is no longer 'Imperial Physician Lin' and that all civil and military officials will have to call him "Prime Minister Lin".

All things require a gradual process. From the imperial physician to prime minister is too big a leap. The court still needed to save face. In the end, the empress dowager named Lin Qingyu Minister of Ceremonies, a third rank position.

When Xiao Songzi placed the teacup lightly on the table, Lin Qingyu opened his eyes. Xiao Songzi thought that he must have woken him up with the noise

and so hurriedly knelt down and apologized, “This useless servant disturbed Master Lin’s sleep.”

Lin Qingyu said, “It has nothing to do with you. I have always been a light sleeper. Get up.”

Lin Qingyu has been having nightmares for days. This listlessness was unavoidable. In order to avoid the nightmares, he has not slept for three nights, making do with naps taken throughout the day. After several days of stress, Lin Qingyu lost a lot of weight, the contours of his face becoming even

more pronounced. He drank the tea from Xiao Songzi and asked, “Is there any news from the Northwest?”

This was the third time Lin Qingyu had asked that day. Xiao Songzi shook his head and said, “Master Lin, the last report from the Northwest arrived not too long ago. The next one most likely won’t come so soon.”

Lin Qingyu said softly, “But, he used to write me a letter every two or three days.”

“Didn’t you say that the situation in the Northwest is at a critical juncture? General Gu must be too busy.”

No matter how busy he was, he would never not reply to his letters.

A eunuch came in and said, “Master Lin, the emperor is requesting your presence.”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “I understand.”

After the change in Qinzheng Hall, he had confined Xiao Jie to his chambers. At first, Xiao Jie was restless all day and wanted to see him every day. Once he got to see Lin Qingyu, the only thing he asked about was Xi Rong’s situation,

begging him repeatedly to spare Xi Rong. Later, Lin Qingyu gave Xiao Jie some medicine and Xiao Jie quieted down for a time.

All things considered, he treated Xiao Jie well. Not only did he not kill him, he even allowed him to stay in the palace, afforded every luxury. Besides being

deprived of his freedom, Xiao Jie remained the same idle emperor who cared nothing of state affairs.

When he arrived at the emperor's sleeping chambers, Lin Qingyu saw Xiao Jie standing in front of a table, hair all disheveled, holding a writing brush in hand, looking as though he had just finished writing something.

Lin Qingyu said, "Your Majesty."

"You're here." Xiao Jie's eyes were empty, "Here, my edict of abdication."

Two eunuchs brought up a chair. Lin Qingyu sat down and asked, "What does the emperor mean by this?"

Xiao Jie said numbly, "Isn't this what you want?"

Lin Qingyu straightened his clothes and said, "If this is what I want, why would I have waited until now?"

"Just take it! I'm begging you." Xiao Jie suddenly became hysterical, "I don't want to be emperor. Why did you put me here?"

If he hadn't become emperor, he would still be in his mansion right now, with A'Rong. His biggest worry every day would be what to eat for his next meal. If

he hadn't become emperor, they wouldn't have had anything to do with matters in the Northwest and they wouldn't be where they were now.

It was Lin Qingyu who pushed him to this position. Everything was Lin Qingyu's fault.

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly. "I put you there? From the very beginning, did I ever force you?"

Xiao Jie's lips trembled. "You were the one who looked for me. You said…"

Lin Qingyu interrupted, "I looked for Xi Rong and it was Xi Rong who conspired with me. Dare I ask the emperor, was there ever even a single time that I spoke to you about about how to ascend to the throne?"

Xiao Jie was startled and he raised his head in a daze.

"I was not the one who pushed you to the throne. Your A'Rong pushed you to the throne." Lin Qingyu said cruelly, "You have no one to blame but yourself

for where you are today. Back then, so long as even one of you two said no, you wouldn't have found yourself sitting on that throne."

Xiao Jie opened his eyes. No one could possibly tell just how much he understood of what Lin Qingyu said. "That's not it. Without you, A'Rong and I would have been fine."

Lin Qingyu was too lazy to waste any more time on him. "Since the emperor has decided to abdicate," he gestured at Xiao Songzi with his eyes and Xiao Songzi stepped forward to put away the edict, "then I will accept this. But, as I said earlier, whether you are the emperor or not , I cannot save Xi Rong."

Tears flowed from Xiao Jie's eyes. "Let me meet him. Let me stay with him…"

Lin Qingyu snorted coldly, his answer already evident.

"You already plan on killing him. Why can't you even agree to this request?"

"I can't." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "My husband and I are on different sides of the sky, what is this to that?"

After Xiao Jie asked to abdicate, Lin Qingyu confined him in Jinyang Garden from where he would never come out. And thus, the only one left with the late Emperor's blood was King Huai, Xiao Li. Several of the old kings, faraway in their fiefs, began sending letters, saying that they wanted to pay their New

Year's greetings to the empress dowager in the capital. What it was they truly intended was no mystery to anyone.

At this time, the ever unfathomable National Teacher proclaimed a reading from a celestial phenomena. — Nine stars in the heavens, the true son follows the right path; the soul returns to its body, unifying the country.

The Dayu has always favored lineage through the official wife and many of the older officials valued purity of blood. Hearing the National Teacher's meaning that after King Huai's ascension to the throne, his soul loss disease might be cured, half of the dissenting voices was silenced. Most importantly though, their objections were useless. The army was Lin Qingyu's and many among the previous court was the empress dowager's. Empress Dowager Wen will tolerate no one on the throne save her own son. She had deposed one emperor, she could depose another.

Under the current situation, it was already a blessing amidst misfortune that the country would remain under the name Xiao.

On the day Xiao Li ascended the throne, Lin Qingyu personally placed the crown on his head. The seventeen-year-old boy obediently let him move him about, his delicate features obscured by the jade bean tassels. The tassels were

long and heavy. Xiao Li kept trying to rip it off but Lin Qingyu stopped him. “Don’t move.”

Xiao Li obediently put down his hand.

“Let’s go.”

For this enthronement ceremony, Lin Qingyu finally didn’t have to kneel. Holding Xiao Li’s hand, he walked past all the officials, stepped onto the long series of steps and walked step by step into Zichen Palace, step by step to the pinnacle of power.

He stood in the bright hall, looked down at all living beings, looked down at the civil and military officials, princes, dukes and ministers, as they all bowed their heads and kowtowed, shouting “Long live the emperor”. Beside him, the emperor in his black dragon robe sat upon the dragon throne, a dull and wooden expression on his face. Only when he meets Lin Qingyu’s eyes by chance, did he burst into a charming smile.

After Xiao Li ascended the throne, he moved from Ci’an Palace to Xingqing Palace. The boy, who mentally, was only three or four years old, was separated from his mother, leaving only Xiu momo to look after him in his sleeping chambers.

Lin Qingyu had been busy with the enthronement ceremony, leaving him a lot of things still to deal with in Qinzheng Hall. In the middle of the night, Qinzheng Hall was ablaze with lights. Though it was after midnight, reports

were piled high on the desk like a mountain. Feeling drowsy, Lin Qingyu was thinking about preparing a refreshing decoction for himself, when he suddenly heard a voice behind him, “Why is Doctor Lin sleeping here?”

Lin Qingyu suddenly froze. He turned around slowly and met a pair of bright eyes. Those eyes were smiling, plump lower eyelids evident under those eyes.

—Is this a dream?

Under the palace lanterns, the young man’s features could be seen clearly — handsome features with flamboyant eyes and brows, reminiscent of cool breezes and clear moonlight, possessing a reserved and magnificent charm, even more so evident than during their meeting three years ago. He had short and clean-cut hair. He wore a loose short-sleeved shirt with strange symbols

printed on it and plain black trousers. He had no robe donned on and his legs looked straight and slender.

This was the second time he was meeting this young man.

The young man walked towards him. Leaning against the dragon desk, he looked down at him with a smile. “Long time no see, Qingyu.”

Lin Qingyu opened his lips, “…Jiang Xing?”

The corners of Jiang Xing’s lips hooked up. “As expected, you already knew my name.”

His heart seemed to pinch, Lin Qingyu refused to think about the reason for the sudden severe pain. He lowered his head evasively, not looking at the boy. He murmured in a panic, “Why…why am I dreaming of you?”

Jiang Xing cupped his cheeks and said with a smile, “Of course it’s because you miss me, Baobei.”

Lin Qingyu looked up at Jiang Xing. He stared at him without moving. The rims of his eyes weren’t red. He didn’t feel any stinging in his eyes. Lin Qingyu himself didn’t know when streams of tears escaped from the corner of his eyes and onto Jiang Xing’s hands.

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Chapter 101

When Lu Wancheng died of illness, Lin Qingyu didn't cry; when Jiang Xing came back, he didn't cry; when he said goodbye to Gu Fuzhou, he still didn't cry. Now reunited after a long absence, with Jiang Xing's soul in this dream, he cried.

Everything in the dream was so real, so real that Jiang Xing could still feel the beating heart in his chest. The empty and lonely palace, the scrolls on the table,

the lingering fragrance of ink, and the flickering lamp lights. Lin Qingyu's tears fell drop by drop, as if hitting his heart.

He had seen Lin Qingyu holding back tears with eyes rimmed red, but he has never seen him like this — not frowning, not sobbing, simply looking at him and crying silently.

Jiang Xing's body was permeated with a deep ache. It was worse than dying of illness, worse than being wracked with poison, even worse than having a thousand arrows pierce his heart.

It hurt so much that he wanted to cry.

But he can't. If he cried too, who would coax Lin Qingyu. He couldn't cry in front of Lin Qingyu. That would be most uncool.

Jiang Xing smiled while holding back his tears. "What's the matter, Baobei? We've finally seen each other, why are you crying? Do you not like my original appearance?"

Lin Qingyu looked at him silently. After a long time, he shook his head, his face cupped in Jiang Xing's palms.

Wiping away Lin Qingyu's tears with his smooth and slender fingertips, Jiang Xing said, "I'm very happy that I get to see you in my original form. I hope you

can cheer up a bit too."

For their last meeting, he didn't want to make Lin Qingyu sad.

Lin Qingyu seemed to understand his intentions. Also seeming to try to convince himself, he said, sounding dazed, "You came back because I missed you?"

"That's right. Don't they say that what you think of in the morning, you dream of at night?" Jiang Xing said softly, "Since you miss me, naturally, you'll dream about me."

… But why is it not Gu Fuzhou who came, but you?

He had tried so hard to recall Jiang Xing's appearance but he couldn't remember at all The young man in front of him is so vivid — his figure was

reflected in his pupils, the palm holding his cheek was warm; every detail was perfect and just right.

Lin Qingyu held back from asking that question. Seemingly as if so long as he didn't ask or think about it, this was just an ordinary dream.

Lin Qingyu raised his hand and tremblingly touched the young man's forehead. The young man took his hand and put it on his lips to kiss it.

Lin Qingyu said softly, "It seems you haven't changed at all since three years ago."

He had finally managed to coax Lin Qingyu back into a good mood. Or in other words, Lin Qingyu had managed to coax himself.

Jiang Xing's throat moved slightly. "In dreams, people never grow up." He smiled again, "Why? You used to complain I was too old. Now, you think I'm too young? Don't forget, I'm only a year younger than you."

Lin Qingyu smiled. The smile was broken but still bright and touching. "Sure enough, you really like your original form the most."

"Of course. Lu Wancheng was too delicate and Gu Fuzhou is too strong and muscly. Neither of them are suitable for me."

"I'll remember." Lin Qingyu locked his eyes firmly on him. "I'll remember your

initial appearance."

Jiang Xing said, "No need. It's fine if you forget."

"It's not fine. It's not fine at all!" Lin Qingyu, who had just finally calmed down, suddenly became extremely flustered. "I want to remember. I don't want to forget. Don't let me forget…"

Seeing Lin Qingyu so helpless, Jiang Xing quickly hugged him into his arms and coaxed him, "You won't forget it. My Baobei has a photographic memory. You're amazing."

"But last time, last time I forgot." Lin Qingyu pressed his cheek against the young man's chest, desperately restraining his turbulent emotions. Jiang Xing hoped he could cheer up a bit, that he wouldn't cry anymore.

Jiang Xing had no choice but to lie to him. "That's because I didn't stay long enough last time. This time I'll stay for a long while."

Lin Qingyu grabbed Jiang Xing's shirt, the fabric felt softer than any he had ever felt before. The young man's breath was clean and refreshing and it completely enveloped him.

No matter whose body Jiang Xing used, he wouldn't care. So long as it was Jiang Xing inside, he was sure his interest would be aroused and he would

grow to like him. But he also couldn't deny that in this world, only Jiang Xing's own appearance could take his breath away with a single glance.

Young Master Jiang returned back to his own body was the complete Jiang Xing.

Lin Qingyu asked, "A long while… How long is that?"

Jiang Xing went silent for a while before saying, "We still have at least one more night. Enough to make up for that date we didn't finish last time."

That date last time…?

Lin Qingyu felt a twinge of pain in his heart. "An entire day, twenty-four hours. One hour less and that doesn't count as a day."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "So you still remember."

He remembered. Of course he remembered. On that day, he hadn't completed his date with Jiang Xing. He thought there would be many more opportunities in the future. He thought they still had a lot of time…He really had thought so.

"We'll wait until you come back," Lin Qingyu insisted on deceiving himself. "When you come back from the Northwest, I won't care about anything else.

I'll lock you up and constantly keep you under my watch. I won't let you go anywhere. Every hour or every day, you can only spend with me."

Jiang Xing turned his head and closed his eyes. When looked once again at Lin Qingyu, he smiled. "Alright. But Baobei, let's think about this first. What would you like to do tonight?"

Lin Qingyu buried his face against his chest and did not respond.

Jiang Xing stopped asking. To be able to embrace each other quietly for this entire night was nice as well.

After an unknown amount of time, Lin Qingyu pushed him away. He pointed to a spot on his clothes and asked, "What is this?"

"Hmm…?" Jiang Xing looked down at his chest, "This is the school badge. I'm

wearing a school uniform."

"This school uniform, how do you take it off?"

Jiang Xing was taken aback. "Qingyu…?"

Lin Qingyu said firmly, "I want to, to invite you again."

Jiang Xing's heart trembled so much that he couldn't speak.

"Don't reject me again." Lin Qingyu's voice trembled slightly, "Jiang Xing."

The next moment, Lin Qingyu's vision flickered. The thinly dressed boy carried him off his feet and headed towards the bed with long strides.

When Lin Qingyu was laid down on the bed, he remembered that there wasn't any bed in Qinzheng Hall. Jiang Xing explained, "This is a dream, baby. You can have whatever you want in your dream."

Lin Qingyu couldn't care less about this. He moved in closer and kissed the corner of Jiang Xing's mouth.

This kiss seemed to turn on some certain switch in the young man's body. He sank deep into the bed, their lips pressed against each other's, their tongues

intertwined. His hairpin was pulled away, letting his long hair spread across the pillow.

If Jiang Xing were still Gu Fuzhou, their long strands of black hair would be entangled at this time. But Jiang Xing right now had short hair. When he bowed his head to kiss him, his bangs slightly obscured his eyes.

Jiang Xing's tongue was not in any way small.

Lin Qingyu was wearing his official uniform, layer after layer of heavy cloth. He raised his hand and caressed the young man's short hair, his long sleeves slipping off and revealing two slender alabaster arms.

In a dream, he wouldn't feel cold.

His uniform was taken off but Lin Qingyu could do nothing about Jiang Xing's clothes. Jiang Xing taught him how to take it off bit by bit. Finally, he asked him, "Isn't it very convenient? Much more convenient than the Dayu's clothes."

Lin Qingyu nodded slightly and asked, "You…will you?"

Jiang Xing smiled. "Guess."

With a dream, the dim light of night, candles casting shadows bright, gray, rosy.

A hand clutched helplessly at the gauzy curtain hanging around the bed.

Suddenly, the hand exerted great force as though unable to hold on. Knuckles turned white and the gauze curtain was torn off. The jade beads scattered across the floor, the pattering sound echoing in the empty hall.

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and gritted his teeth. He couldn't stop the tears from falling from his eyes.

Maybe it was because of the pain or maybe it was something else.

"Don't cry, Baobei." Jiang Xing said, voice low. "If you keep crying, you'll make me doubt my skills and then I'll wither."

"Liar. It's obviously… obviously so energetic."

Jiang Xing smiled, "I can't hide anything from you."

Lin Qingyu wanted to open his eyes, but a hand suddenly blocked his sight. "Don't look at me," Jiang Xing said, sounding breathy, "I'll be embarrassed."

Lin Qingyu was almost out of breath. He tried his best to curve his lips and said, "I can feel you in my body."

Jiang Xing choked for breath and didn't speak any more. He just grabbed Lin Qingyu's hands and let them wrap around his shoulders.

In the dream, their bodies knew not that they were guests and every cry

coveted joy.

And after this endless tenderness, all that is left will be the collapse of the dream. What else could be left to remain?

After calming down, Jiang Xing lay on his shoulder and the first thing he said was, “I’m sorry.”

Lin Qingyu felt the wetness on his shoulders. After such happiness, a hint of confusion appeared in his eyes.

Was Jiang Xing… crying?

This man wouldn’t let him cry but he was crying himself.

“Qingyu, I’m sorry.” Jiang Xing hugged him, like a child who did his best but still couldn’t do anything well. He felt so wronged that he didn’t know what to do. “I’m sorry…”

Lin Qingyu asked him, “Why are you crying?”

Why are you cry so desperately after we’ve done this most intimate thing?

He wanted to push the young man to create distance between them to let him see how the young man was crying. But he was too tired, he couldn’t move. He

could only feel the young man's tears flowing out unceasingly, wetting his long hair.

After Jiang Xing had cried enough, he got up from him. Apart from the reddened eyes, there was nothing unusual about his expression. He asked Lin Qingyu worriedly, "Am I still handsome?"

Lin Qingyu smiled. "Yes."

Jiang Xing smiled and hugged him from behind. "Do you want to sleep for a while?"

Lin Qingyu said immediately, "No."

Jiang Xing was by his side, whispering sweet words of love softly in his ear. Until a ray of light appeared in the sky and Jiang Xing looked out the window. "It seems that time is almost up."

Lin Qingyu's body suddeny froze.

Jiang Xing sighed softly, "This night passed so quickly."

Lin Qingyu realized something and he once again tried to deliberately ignore reality, torturing himself cruelly. "Don't." He hugged the boy tightly and

expending every last bit of his strength, “Jiang Xing, don’t…don’t leave me alone…”

Jiang Xing stroked his hair. “Qingyu, this is just a dream.”

“No… no.” Lin Qingyu’s eyes were opened wide, starting to fill with unshed tears. His quiet mask was torn off, revealing an uncontrollable madness,

“You’re lying to me again. Jiang Xing, how many more times are you going to lie to me?”

The young man’s silhouette gradually begun to blur. “This is the last time, Qingyu.”

The last……? Is this the end? No, he wants to stay here, stay here with Jiang Xing.

Jiang Xing promised him.

He promised him!

…Jiang Xing!

Lin Qingyu woke up from the dream. It was dawn and there was no one else in Qinzheng Hall except him.

He sat alone in front of the desk, piles of scrolls on its surface. The candle beside him had already been burned out.

Lin Qingyu sat quietly with a blank look on his face. He remembered every word Jiang Xing said, every movement Jiang Xing made. But he couldn’t remember Jiang Xing’s face.

Lin Qingyu slowly closed his eyes, a tear falling on the last letter sent from the

Northwest.

At the same moment, in Xingqing Palace not far from Qinzheng Hall, Xiao Li who was sleeping soundly suddenly opened his eyes without any warning.

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Chapter 102

The flickering red lamp light, the lingering fragrance of ink, the hazy veil and Lin Qingyu who almost cried the entire night…they all disappeared. But physically, the feeling from the dream remained. It seemed as though he could still feel Lin Qingyu holding on to him so tightly. Lin Qingyu begging him, begging him not to leave; even cursing at him, asking him why he was lying to him again.

After a dazed moment, Jiang Xing sat up abruptly. He looked down at his chest and with trembling hands, he placed them over it.

His heart was beating fast and powerfully, again and again, unburdened by the soreness of poison or the pain of being pierced by thousands of arrows.

He wasn't dead; he was alive. And unlike the previous two times, being in this new body didn't feel at all strange; he even had an indescribable sense of belonging. It was as if… as if he was back in his own body.

However, the joy of having survived a disaster was short-lived. Jiang Xing didn't have time to think about the reason why he was back from the dead

again. He got out the bed and still barefooted, looked at everything around him.

Please, this has to be the Dayu. It has to be the world with Lin Qingyu in it. I beg you.

A terrifying thought flashed through his mind. What if it's not? If it's not, if he dies again, would he have a chance to go back?

Beside the bed was a dozing eunuch. The room was surrounded with exquisite palace lanterns, covered in soft carpets and bounded by pillars engraved with the nine-clawed dragon pattern. Hanging nearby was a black and gold dragon robe—he knew this dragon robe, only the emperor of the Dayu's dragon robe had black and gold like this.

Jiang Xing's limbs seemed to go numb. Before this moment, he had never dared to imagine that one day he would have such a strong feeling of regaining what he'd lost.

He had transmigrated into Xiao Jie.

It didn't matter. He could transmigrate into anyone so long as he was still here.

Jiang Xing subconsciously raised his hand to cover his eyes. Tears spilled from between his fingers. He wanted to wipe away the tears, but the more he wiped, the more the tears overflowed. Through the blurriness, he began to have

double vision leading him to wonder if this new body could bear such strong emotions.

It was impossible to bear; a normal person simply couldn't bear it.

F*ck, talk about tormenting a person. He really thought he was going to die. He thought he would never see Lin Qingyu again. He…he even slept with Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu had been crying nonstop. Damn it.

Now was not the time for his legs to go numb. He had to get back to Lin Qingyu and he had to get back as quickly as possible. Lin Qingyu was still waiting for him.

In the dream, Lin Qingyu had been in Qinzheng Hall. The place he was currently in should be Xiao Jie's bedroom. The two places weren't that far apart.

When Jiang Xing rushed out of this sleeping chamber, he was only wearing a close-fitting robe. The wind was bitingly cold but he felt none of the cold as he stepped on the icy steps.

A palace maid was walking towards him but he had no time to stop, nor did he want to stop.

It was almost time for the emperor to wake up. Xiu Jiao momo was carrying a basin with hot water, preparing to help His Majesty wash up once he wakes up. Before she could even take a step into the bed chamber, she saw the emperor

rush out from inside. The expression on his face was no longer the usual empty and numb expression, rather it was a kind of impatient eagerness. Even normal people running for their lives wouldn't be able to match the anxiousness on his face.

Xiu Jiao momo was stunned. When the little emperor was about to fly past her, she came back to her senses. "Your-Your Majesty?! Servants, come quickly! His Majesty-His Majesty seems to have gone crazy!"

As soon as she yelled out, all the maids on duty in Xingqing Palace, the eunuchs and the guards rushed out from every directions. Jiang Xing was blocked by a few guards. He opened his mouth, wanting to dismiss them but

found that he couldn't utter a word. He tried again, but still couldn't make a sound.

… When did Xiao Jie become mute?

"Your Majesty!" Xiu Jiao momo rushed over, still carrying the washbasin. Seeing Jiang Xing's feet red from the cold, she said anxiously, "Why did you run out by yourself?!"

She has taken care of the emperor for a long time. She knew that although the emperor was a dullard, he was an obedient child. He was extremely slow in everything; it was unthinkable for him to move so fast now.

From out the corner of his eye, he caught sight of his own reflection on the water. Jiang Xing's heart almost stopped beating again.

This was not Xiao Jie's face. It seemed…it seemed to be his own face.

The young man in the reflection had long loose hair. Traces of tears had pooled at the corner of his eyes. Though not exactly the same as his original

face, it was extremely similar. The slight differences were mostly due to the hairstyle and ancient fashions.

The Dayu's emperor was Xiao Jie but this body was obviously not Xiao Jie's.

Fear spread from his cold feet to his entire body. He had never seen any of these palace maids or eunuchs. The faces of the guards were also unfamiliar.

Who was he?

Could it be that he was still in the Dayu but not in the same time period as Lin Qingyu?

Amidst his desperation, he finally heard a familiar voice. "What's the matter? What has happened to the Emperor!"

"Eunuch Song!" Xiu Jiao momo went to the doctor in a hurry, "There's something wrong with the Emperor. Eunuch Song, hurry up and find Master Lin!"

When Xiao Songzi heard this, he became anxious. "Looking for Master Lin is no use. Master Lin can't cure the Emperor's soul loss disease. We should call for the National Teacher."

A eunuch said, "The National Teacher has been busy praying for the war in the Northwest for the past couple of days. So he's staying in Yanfu Hall. I'll call

him right away!"

So he's transmigrated into Xiao Li?

At this time, no matter how well his bearing, he couldn't help but swear, 'What the absolute f*cking f*ck! You're really toying with me!'

Jiang Xing pushed away Xiu Jiao momo and Xiao Songzi. He pushed all the eunuchs and maids out of his way and heedlessly rushed out of the crowd. The imperial guards could certainly stop him, but he was the emperor now. Seeing how desperate he was, who would dare to go up and stop him. In case His Majesty's dragon's body was injured, the empress dowager would make sure that heads would roll. They could only follow after him and protect him from every side.

"Your Majesty, Your Majesty—!"

Someone yelled, "Hurry up! Go to Ci'an Palace and report to the Empress Dowager!"

Jiang Xing has lived three lifetimes but he has never run so fast, so fast that afterimages of the surrounding scenery begun to appear, so fast that a trace of

blood begun to sneak out the corner of his mouth. The doors of Qinzheng Hall were getting closer and closer——

Baobei, don't cry. You'll ruin your eyes from crying. Your husband will be there soon.

The eunuch on duty in Qinzheng Hall felt only a gust of wind as an unknown object flew past, followed by a large group of people from Xingqing Palace. Those who didn't know about this commotion would have thought that the Xixia had reached the capital and even broken into the palace.

The furnishings in Qinzheng Hall were exactly as in the dream, even the scrolls spread out on the table were the same.

But what about his wife? Where did his wife go!

He wasn't in the main hall; not in the side hall either. He was nowhere to be found. Had Lin Qingyu really done something stupid?… Impossible, his Baobei wouldn't do anything with the word "stupid".

Xiu Jiao momo saw that he seemed to be looking for something and asked, "Your Majesty, what do you want?"

Jiang Xing has transmigrated twice, so he naturally he knew the necessity of keeping in-character. But right now, his heart was burning so badly that he had long put aside maintaining his character settings. Seeing that there were

brushes and paper on the table, he ran forward without hesitation, picked up the brush and was about to write when——

Xiao Songzi had a flash of inspiration and cautiously probed, “Your Majesty, do you want to see Master Lin?”

As they all knew, the newly enthroned emperor only ever has a special reaction to just one person – He will smile only at Master Lin.

Jiang Xing nodded abruptly. Without him needing to write, Xiao Songzi said, “Master Lin has left the palace. He must have returned to the General’s mansion.”

Jiang Xing lowered his head again. He dipped the tip of the brush into the ink. A drop of sweat slipped from his forehead, smearing the paper.

“Look,” Xiu Jiao momo’s voice trembled, “Does the Emperor want to write?”

Everyone was dumbfounded. They were just about to gather around to see what would happen, when a voice said, “The National Teacher is here!”

Jiang Xing paused and looked towards the door.

Ci’an Palace and Yanfu Hall weren’t too far from Qinzheng Hall. Xu Junyuan had suddenly been summoned. Without bothering to change into more appropriate clothing, naturally he arrived faster than the empress dowager.

Looking at Jiang Xing's eyes, his face changed slightly and he ordered, "I myself will be enough. The rest of you, withdraw."

Xiu Jiao momo hesitated, "But, the Emperor…"

"There is nothing you can do even if you stay," Xu Junyuan smiled meaningfully, "I am the only one who can cure the emperor's illness. If the empress dowager comes, please remember to announce her arrival."

Xiu Jiao momo and Xiao Songzi exchanged glances then led all the palace maid and eunuchs back. Only Jiang Xing and Xu Junyuan were left in Qinzheng Hall.

Xu Junyuan saluted and said politely, "Might I ask who Your Excellency is?"

Jiang Xing frantically wrote two words: 【Jiang Xing. 】

Xu Junyuan revealed surprise on his face. He pondered for a moment and couldn't help sighing. "So that's how it is."

【What do you mean? 】

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "Jiang Gongzi's soul has returned to his old body

and his soul and body are matched. Allow me to congratulate you."

【Why can't I speak? 】

Xu Junyuan said, "Jiang Gongzi, do not worry. You are not mute. It is merely that this body has not spoken for seventeen years. It will take some time for the body to get used to it."

Jiang Xing no longer concerned himself over this matter: 【Take me out of the palace. Take me to the General's Mansion. 】

Xu Junyuan showed an embarrassed expression. "I'm afraid this is a little difficult."

【? 】

Xu Junyuan couldn't understand this symbol but he could guess what Jiang Xing wanted to express. "The empress dowager is coming. Does Jiang Gongzi think she will let you out?"

Jiang Xing thought about it calmly. Empress Dowager Wen loved her son like her own life. Obviously, she would not let her son run away from the palace under such circumstances.

【Then you bring Qingyu here. 】

After Jiang Xing finished writing, he added another sentence: 【Tell him first

that I'm not dead.】

"This is possible." Xu Junyuan murmured, "But simply saying so would be no use. What evidence does Jiang Gongzi have to prove that you're not dead?"

Jiang Xing picked up a pen and pondered. He had so many things he wanted to say to Lin Qingyu but this wasn't the time to talk nonsense. The less time he wasted here, the less time Lin Qingyu will be sad.

He first had to let Lin Qingyu know that he wasn't dead. He'll save the other words of love for later.

Fortunately, they once again had a future together.

Jiang Xing wrote.

【If odd, change. If even, remain the same. For the symbols look to the quadrant. —— Jiang Xing.】

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Chapter 103

Just after Xu Junyuan put away Jiang Xing's letter, there came an announcement from outside, "The Empress Dowager has arrived—"

Xu Junyuan said, "Jiang Gongzi… No, I should now respectfully address you as 'Your Majesty'."

'Stop it with your garbage' was writ all across Jiang Xing's face.

"I know Your Majesty is in a hurry but to prevent the Empress Dowager from getting suspicious and causing unnecessary trouble, I ask that Your Majesty be patient."

This was a reminder him for him not to act too out of character too soon. Jiang Xing nodded. He pointed to the door, signaling Xu Junyuan to leave the ink and go.

Xu Junyuan said again, "Do not worry, Your Majesty. I will definitely send Your Majesty's 'letter home' to Master Lin as soon as possible."

As soon as Xu Junyuan finished speaking, the Empress Dowager trotted in hurriedly with the support of Lai Fu. "Li'er—!"

While pretending to be a 'god of war' general had been a bit difficult,

pretending to be a dullard was a piece of cake. Jiang Xing put away the expression on his face, lowered his head and said nothing. Just that was already half the game.

The Empress Dowager held Jiang Xing's hand and found that he was frighteningly cold. "Go quickly and bring in a charcoal brazier — What's going on? Why did the Emperor come running to Qinzheng Hall for no rhyme and reason?"

Xiu Jiao momo told the empress dowager exactly what had happened. Jiang Xing hated how he couldn't speak for himself. Fortunately, after she finished

speaking, Xiao Songzi added, “The Emperor seems to be looking for Master Lin.”

The empress dowager hurriedly said, “Then please summon Master Lin to the palace!”

Nice! He knew he could always count on XIao Songzi.

Xu Junyuan knew that the empress dowager wasn’t going to let him go anytime soon. So he glanced at Jiang Xing and said, “This humble servant shall arrange for someone to go and summon him.”

The empress dowager ordered the momos to take Jiang Xing to for a bath and a change of clothes. Afterwards, just as Xu Junyuan expected, she turned to him, “National Teacher, what is happening to his Majesty…?”

Xu Junyuan explained, “That the Emperor can respond to the outside world is a good thing. It’s better to be emotional than not at all.”

The empress dowager was immediately overjoyed. “Does the National Teacher mean that the emperor’s soul-loss disease will start to improve?”

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, “‘Nine stars in the heavens, the true son follows the right path; the soul returns to its body, unifying the country’. Your

Highness, these words by this humble servant were truly from what this humble servant has seen of the stars."

The empress dowager couldn't contain her excitement. "Aijia has been looking forward to this for so many years. Finally, this day has come…"

After taking a bath, Jiang Xing put on a new dragon robe. He stood in front of the mirror, looking at the young man in the mirror. Xiao Li looked very much like him, though seemingly a little shorter and thinner than when he was seventeen, probably from all those times he played in the mud before.

The empress dowager wanted to spend more time with her son but Jiang Xing fell asleep after taking a bath. In the end, the empress dowager was getting on in years and after all the fuss, the fatigue on her face was quite apparent. Xu Junyuan urged, "I will watch over His Majesty in Xingqing Palace. The Empress Dowager's phoenix body is of greatest import. Might I convince Her Highness to go back to Ci'an Palace to rest?"

"No," said the empress dowager, "Aijia will rest in the side hall. If the emperor wakes up, come and inform Aijia immediately."

As soon as the empress dowager left, Xu Junyuan dismissed the other palace maids and eunuchs with different excuses. With everyone else gone, Jiang Xing immediately lifted the quilt and sat up. He could finally think about how to

coax Lin Qingyu later. He couldn't speak for the time being, so he could only write down what he wanted to say.

He wrote haphazardly, writing whatever came to mind. Let alone writing them with any sort of logic, he even forgot there there was no such thing as punctuation in the Dayu. He was worried that the characters would be too small for Lin Qingyu to read clearly, so he wrote the characters quite large. Every sentence needed its own sheet of paper.

Xu Junyuan said that his loss of voice was only temporary. This body had never utilize its voice box so it couldn't adapt so easily. If so, would he be able to vocalize with a bit of trial and practice?

The palace official tasked with the message rushed to the General's Mansion. He explained to Yuan Yin his intention for coming. Yuan Yin said, "Gong gong, please wait a moment. I will report to the Madam now."

Half an hour ago, Lin Qingyu had returned to the General's Mansion. During the past year, Lin Qingyu to returning home late at night had become a normal occurrence and Yuan Yin didn't find it strange. He welcomed Lin Qingyu into the mansion as usual and asked if he would like to have a midnight snack. Lin Qingyu nodded and said yes.

It was all business as usual.

When Huan Tong sent in the meal, he saw Lin Qingyu calmly rummaging through boxes and cabinets calmly. He asked, "Young Master, what are you

looking for?"

"The box." Lin Qingyu said in the usual tone, "Where is the box with the ring and the letters?"

"Oh, here it is." Huan Tong kept feeling that something was a little strange. Before he had time to think about it too much, he brought the brocade box and

handed it to Lin Qingyu. When Lin Qingyu took it, a chill crept up Huan Tong's back.

He now realized the reason for this sense of wrongness—His young master had a photographic memory, how could he not even remember where such an important thing was put away?

Lin Qingyu's movement as he opened the brocade box remained unhurried, calm and composed. Finally, he found what he was looking for. He smiled and said, "Look, he promised me."

Huan Tong said in alarm. "Young Master?"

"He wrote me a letter of guarantee." Lin Qingyu said firmly, "He wouldn't lie to me."

Huan Tong became more and more flustered, "Young Master, what are you talking about?"

Lin Qingyu seemed unable to hear his words. Or rather, he was deliberately avoiding everything in this world and immersing himself in another illusory world. "It's just a dream…it's just a dream. "His expression suddenly became cruel and distorted but his face remained beautiful and delicate, "How dare he lie to me!"

In the brocade box, apart from the letter of guarantee, there was also the engagement ring Jiang Xing gave him and every letter he wrote him this past

year.

Lin Qingyu picked up the top one. In the letter, Jiang Xing said aggrievedly that he was very hungry and couldn't get enough to eat; that he wanted to eat

his mother-in-law's plum cake. At the end of the letter, Jiang Xing told him to eat well and sleep well.

Eat… Jiang Xing wants him to eat well.

Lin Qingyu walked to the table, picked up the pastry off the plate and stuffed it into his mouth. Before he could even swallow one, he had already stuffed another in. Huan Tong hurriedly stopped him. "Young Master!"

Lin Qingyu's eyes were red but he couldn't get any tears to fall. His tears had already dried up in his dream.

As soon as Yuan Yin entered the room and saw the scene in front of him, even he who had seen a great many things, was startled, "Madam?"

Lin Qingyu forcibly swallowed what was in his mouth. He lightly brushed the crumbs from his lips with his fingertips and said nonchalantly, "What is it?"

Yuan Yin didn't dare to look directly at Lin Qingyu. He bowed his head and said, "There are people from the palace asking you to go see the Emperor. The palace officer also brought a letter."

Hearing the word "letter", Lin Qingyu swayed a little, unsteady on his feet. Huan Tong supported him to stand firm.

What were the people from the palace going to tell him… was it about the

Northwest?

Lin Qingyu heard himself say, “Bring it here.”

When the letter was handed over to him, he suddenly felt sick, so sick that he wanted to vomit. He even had the urge to tear up the letter. But what if, what if it was Jiang Xing’s letter home?

Lin Qingyu’s lashes trembled. His hands shook as he opened the letter.

A line of familiar characters came into view: a sentence he had silently recited countless times and the name engraved in his heart.

From the depths of his chaotic memory, a voice sounded in his mind, “We can agree on a secret signal. If I don’t die and transmigrate to someone else’s body, we’ll use this signal to recognize each other, okay?”

Lin Qingyu’s face showed a rarely seen expression of blank shock. His frighteningly calm breathing sped up as though he were burning up, burning so hot he could nearly lose consciousness.

Yuan Yin said worriedly, “Madam?”

“Prepare…prepare the carriage.” Lin Qingyu said in a daze, his eyes unfocused.

He said sounding distracted, “I’m heading to the palace.”

……Is it you?

If it’s you…it must be you… Please, it must be.

The carriage could only go as far as the gates of the palace. Lin Qingyu went down too fast and for the first time in his life, he stepped on the hem of his robes. Unless there were special circumstances, running through the palace like this wasn’t allowed. But he didn’t care.

Just like that year during the Lantern Festival when he fought his way through the crowd and threw himself into Jiang Xing’s arms.

——”Doctor Lin, what are you running for?”

——”I was coming to you, of course I had to run.”

The magificent palace was growing bigger and bigger as he drew nearer and nearer.

He heard “Master Lin is here” and he entered the emperor’s bed chamber.

The young man in the black dragon robe looked towards him. The young man’s originally still and gloomy face now shone with brilliance. His eyes were

as bright as stars. It was as though they could speak, concealing boundless unbearable love.

The young man's eyes gradually merged with Jiang Xing's eyes from his dream. At this moment, Lin Qingyu felt he had been fished out from the bottom of a cold deep lake.

When the two looked at each other, one word slipped out of the boy's mouth with difficulty, "Qing-yu."

This was the only word he could say.

Lin Qingyu looked at him blankly.

Jiang Xing wanted to speak again, but couldn't make any more sound. He could only take out the words he had written in advance, holding them up one

after another for Lin Qingyu to read:

【Qingyu! Qingyu! ! ! 】

【I'm Jiang Xing! ! ! 】

【I'm back again! ! ! 】

【I'm not a slag man! ! ! 】

【I didn't bed you and run! ! ! 】

【I missed you……】

【I like you so much…】

【I love you. 】

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Chapter 104

While waiting for Lin Qingyu's arrival, Jiang Xing had kept writing. He'd written a lot and he wanted to show Lin Qingyu every one of them. He was so anxious, so anxious that, in his hurry, his hand accidentally slipped and half of the rice papers escaped his hold.

The bitter cold wind suddenly blew open the window, sending the rice papers flying all over the place. Lin Qingyu looked up at them slowly flying down. As though in a trance, he seemed to see a familiar figure; he could vaguely hear someone talking to him.

It was the figure of Lu Wancheng and it was the voice of Gu Fuzhou. When the wind stopped, both of them disappeared, leaving in his world only the young man in front of him.

It was Jiang Xing.

It was really him.

Lu Wancheng was dead. Gu Fuzhou too was dead. But Jiang Xing was still alive.

Jiang Xing saw Lin Qingyu smiling, tears finally falling from his reddened eyes. Like this, he laughed and he cried. He kept laughing with tears flowing,

seeming crazed, love and hatred intertwined.

Through it all, Lin Qingyu still remained so beautiful. A true beauty even in the grip of lunacy was still beautiful enough to stir one's soul.

But he didn't want to appreciate Lin Qingyu's beauty when he was going insane. He liked watching Lin Qingyu deal poison, he liked watching Lin Qingyu do bad things and even more, he liked watching Lin Qingyu's expression as he lay under him. But what he liked most has always been and will always be the way Lin Qingyu looked when he was happy.

Jiang Xing remembered that he had written a lot of comforting words for Lin Qingyu. He randomly flipped through a few pages, but unable to find them, simply gave up.

Was this really the time to be flipping through pages?

Jiang Xing threw the remaining paper onto the table and approached Lin Qingyu, calling out his name again, "Qing-yu."

As soon as he drew near, Lin Qingyu lost strength in his legs and fell to his knees.

Jiang Xing instinctively took him into his arms, blurting out, "Qingyu!"

Lin Qingyu's body couldn't bear the intermingled emotions of grief and joy. It had driven him to the verge of collapse. He closed his eyes and fell asleep in

Jiang Xing's arms.

Jiang Xing's face turned pale. He tried calling for the servants but having only had a short period of time to practice, the only thing he could verbalize for now was "Qingyu". He couldn't say anything else at all. Jiang Xing carried Lin Qingyu to the bed. He then tipped a tall vase to smash against the floor.

Xu Junyuan, who had been guarding the door for the young couple, immediately walked in upon hearing the crash. Seeing Lin Qingyu lying on the bed with his eyes closed, he said before Jiang Xing could write, "I'll go call for the imperial physician."

The arrival of the imperial physician alarmed the empress dowager. She thought something had happened to the emperor. Unexpectedly it was Lin Qingyu who had fainted in the emperor's bed chamber. Seeing her son give up the dragon bed to Lin Qingyu and even closely keeping watch by his bedside

the entire time, she couldn't help the strange feeling that blossomed in her heart.

That was the dragon bed. Setting aside Lin Qingyu's identity as a minister, Lin Qingyu was also Gu Fuzhou's wife. …It seemed wrong.

The empress dowager said softly, "The Emperor seems extraordinarily fond of Lin Qingyu."

Xiu Jiao momo said, "Master Lin is very good-looking and treats His Majesty like a younger brother. Naturally, the Emperor would be very fond of him."

If this truly was brotherly love then it was fine. Only that…

Xu Junyuan interrupted the empress dowager's thoughts, "Imperial Physician Chu, how is Master Lin?"

"Master Lin is fine for the time being. He is only suffering from a low fever. His pulse condition is rapid and weak, a sign that he has experienced great

emotional turmoil." Chu Zhengde said, "Has Master Lin recently felt great joy and great sorrow one after another?"

Xu Junyuan said leisurely, "This, I do not know."

It was far more than just great joy and great sorrow.

Jiang Xing once again realized what he had brought to Lin Qingyu. Not only to Lin Qingyu, he himself had also experienced great joy and great sorrow in this past couple of hours. Although he almost couldn't bear it, he at least managed to retain a trace of sobriety.

But Lin Qingyu couldn't bear it. Perhaps it was most painful for those left behind.

Putting himself in the other's shoes, if he had been the one to receive the bad news of his demise and the good news of his resurrection all in one day, he

would probably go crazy if not die outright. He might not have even lasted long enough to hear the good news.

Therefore, his Baobei was really powerful and strong.

At least, much more so than him.

Chu Zhengde said, “This minister shall prescribe some calming medicine for Master Lin. When Master Lin wakes up, he must rest for a time. He must not be overly happy nor must he be subjected to too many worries.”

The empress dowager couldn’t help frowning. The emperor had just ascended the throne and he was still waiting for Lin Qingyu to stabilize the control and needed him to preside over the overall situation. Lin Qingyu had gotten ill at a bad time. She will have to take over more matters for the time being. “Lai Fu,

prepare the side hall of Xingqing Palace and let Master Lin stay there temporarily. When he wakes up, send him back to the General's Mansion."

Jiang Xing, who was sitting by the bed, stretched out his hand and silently pulled the quilt covering Lin Qingyu's body.

The empress dowager, seeing his little action, asked, "His Majesty doesn't want Master Lin to leave?"

Jiang Xing nodded.

Receiving her son's response for the first time, she was surprised and delighted. She hurriedly said, "Did you see that? His Majesty… His Majesty spoke to Aijia!"

Xiu Jiao momo nodded with tears in her eyes. "Replying to Her Highness, all the servants saw. The emperor is indeed getting better."

Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "Since the emperor wishes to stay with Master Lin, Her Highness might as well let Master Lin accompany the emperor. Perhaps His Majesty will recover sooner."

The empress dowager nearly wept with joy. "Alright, yes. Let Master Lin stay in Xingqing Palace for the time being."

How could she not know that this was against the rules? If the imperial censors were to find out, they would bring no end of trouble. But who made

her Li'er mentally deficient and ignorant of human affairs, reacting to Lin Qingyu alone? So long as Li'er's soul loss disease could be cured, if he could call her 'mother', she would ask for nothing else.

Lin Qingyu was passed out for an entire day. There were many servants waiting on him and there was not much Jiang Xing could do. After everyone had finally left, Jiang Xing stoked his little hands, he stroked his face. Feeling that this simply wasn't enough, he hugged Lin Qingyu with the quilt between them. After hugging him for a while, he begun to feel that this too wasn't enough.

Lin Qingyu seemed quite cold and he frowned even in sleep.

When Xiu Jiao momo came in with the medicine, what she saw was Jiang Xing throwing off the brocade quilt and making to get in the bed.

Xiu Jiao momo patiently explained to him, "Your Majesty, this servant knows that you might not understand this right now. But Master Lin has a husband and his husband is General Gu, who is fighting in the Northwest. You can hold hands with him, but you must never sleep with him."

Jiang Xing: "… Eh."

Lin Qingyu woke up. He opened his eyes and after some time, saw clearly the person beside his bed. The young man, dragon robe on his body and a jade

crown on his head, saw him wake up and heaved a sigh of relief. He called out, “Qingyu.”

After practicing for an entire day, Jiang Xing was finally able to smoothly say Lin Qingyu’s name. For the rest, he would have to rely on writing.

【You’re awake.】

Is it Xiao Li? No, it’s…

Gradually, reason and memory came back. Lin Qingyu sat up suddenly, grabbed the young man like a drowning man grabbing driftwood.

“…Jiang Xing.”

His voice was so hoarse that he could hardly make a sound.

Jiang Xing let him hold on to him tightly. He mouthed, “It’s me, Baobei.”

The longer Lin Qingyu held on, the tighter his grip. His eyes begun to sting, as if he had thought of something extremely terrible. “I thought…” His lips moved slightly, “I thought you were dead.”

Jiang Xing lowered his eyes. He spread open his palm and wrote stroke by stroke: 【I’m sorry.】

He had just finished writing when Lin Qingyu’s tears begun to fall. “You still

lied to me… You lied to me that it was just a dream. You know that it's only when your soul enters a dream that I can see your real appearance. You clearly knew but…"

He knew. But he went anyway.

He just wanted to see Lin Qingyu one more time before leaving.

"You wrote me a letter of guarantee." Lin Qingyu was starting to become incoherent and he was no longer as calm as before, "You said you would come back. You promised me that you would be fine. I didn't go anywhere, I've been waiting for you …You promised me, Jiang Xing. If you really died…"

Lin Qingyu's crying was about to break Jiang Xing's heart. But apart from Lin Qingyu's name, he couldn't say a word. But even if he could, what could he say?

Should he say that he didn't want to die either? That he also desperately wanted to live?

What's the use? In the end, he still couldn't do it.

Jiang Xing closed his eyes and forced himself not to think about how Gu Fuzhou died. He kept in mind the imperial physician's instructions not to let

Lin Qingyu's emotions fluctuate too much. He hugged him even deeper into his arms and stroked Lin Qingyu's long hair over and over.

Lin Qingyu pressed his cheek against Jiang Xing's chest, listening to his heartbeat. He smiled sadly, "Why do you torture me like this… Is it because I love you? Because you know that no matter what, I can't die?"

Jiang Xing's Adam's apple bobbed and the light in his eyes was covered with mist.

"But even I can't stand it anymore." Lin Qingyu murmured as though crazed, "I can't stand it…"

Jiang Xing bowed his head and kissed him. Kissed him on the space between his brows, kissed him on the corner of his eyes, kissed him on his lips. When their lips touched, Lin Qingyu slowly closed his eyes.

Jiang Xing's kiss was also wet. When the two separated, Lin Qingyu saw the young man's damp lashes.

Lin Qingyu wanted to cry again. He was fed up with how much he was crying but he couldn't help it. He could only crawl into Jiang Xing's arms and cling to Jiang Xing even more tightly.

With Jiang Xing's comfort, Lin Qingyu gradually calmed down. Jiang Xing wrapped him in his arms and wrote on his palm, turning to less fraught

matters.

【Xu Junyuan said the loss of my voice is only temporary. I just need to slowly get used to it.】

【Alas, this body has no abdominal muscles.】

【But my tongue is finally not small. What do you think of that, Baobei?】

【Is kissing me better or is kissing Gu Fuzhou better?】

Lin Qingyu suddenly asked, "You… how did Gu Fuzhou die?"

Jiang Xing's answer was simple: 【Died in battle. But in the end, we won that battle.】

Lin Qingyu was taken aback and asked softly, "Did it hurt?"

【There was no pain. I died very quickly, I didn't feel anything. I didn't feel any pain. I was just gone.】

Writing traditional characters is too troublesome. When Lin Qingyu recovers, he will find time to teach Lin Qingyu how to recognize simplified characters.

In his fragile state, Lin Qingyu was very easy to deceive and believed whatever Jiang Xing said. "That's good." Lin Qingyu's reaction was quite slow. He asked

after a while, “Then, why did you wake up in Xiao Li’s body?”

Jiang Xing saw that the ink in the inkstone had run out. He got up and wanted to get a fresh bottle. As soon as he moved, Lin Qingyu’s eyes widened as though he were faced with an enemy. “Where are you going?”

Jiang Xing smiled and pointed to the inkstone.

Lin Qingyu understood what he meant and asked, “When are you coming back?”

Jiang Xing stopped trying to leave and hugged Lin Qingyu even tighter.

Lin Qingyu lowered his head slowly. He remained silent for a moment and said, “I’m sorry, I know I’m not acting normal right now.” He looked at his hands and said helplessly, “But I…I can’t control it.”

He didn’t like how he was right now, but he didn’t know how he was supposed to let Jiang Xing out of his sight even if it was only for an hour.

Jiang Xing wrote with the remaining ink:

【No need for you to control it.】

【I like having you cling to me.】

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Chapter 105

In less than a day, Lin Qingyu seemed to be a completely different person. Who would have thought that the powerful official who not long ago, led the new emperor to the throne was at this moment, curled up in the emperor's arms, face pale and wan, his slightly disheveled long hair blocking his side profile, looking like a nesting bird.

Jiang Xing could tell that Lin Qingyu was working hard to get back to normal. But Lin Qingyu had been so agitated, how could he possibly recover with a snap of his fingers? It was only by being by his side all the time and coaxing him patiently was Jiang Xing able to gradually lead him out of the shadows.

Xu Junyuan, who was the only person apart from Lin Qingyu who knew about Jiang Xing's identity, was forcibly kept in the palace simply to create more opportunities for the young couple to be alone together, to let them breathe and have some air. The grand and noble National Teacher was treated like a eunuch by Jiang Xing. There was no other way. Were anyone to see General Gu's wife lingering with the new emperor on the dragon bed, whispering sweet nothings to each other, it would be nothing short of a bloodbath.

After taking the medicine for a couple of days, together with Jiang Xing's company, Lin Qingyu's mood stabilized for the meantime. He would though still occasionally find himself in a trace. Sometimes he couldn't even remember whether he was dreaming or in the real world. When he listened to

others talking to him, it always seemed like there was some sort of barrier, as if the speaker were under water.

Lin Qingyu knew that this was a side effect of the mood stabilizing medicine. Drinking too much made you lethargic and sleeping too much produced more dreams.

Once his condition showed signs of turning for the better, Lin Qingyu updated him on matters that had been happening while he had been in the Northwest — How he moved against Xi Rong and Xiao Jie and how he helped Xiao Li ascend to the throne. He spoke unhurriedly and clearly but when he reached the part of the story about the change in the palace, he suddenly stopped,

pausing for a long time. When he spoke, he did so with a dazed calm, asking, "I…what was I just saying? "

Jiang Xing patiently wrote: 【You received a secret letter from the Xixia agent. 】

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "After that, I headed to the palace."

Jiang Xing wrote: 【Is Xi Rong dead? 】

Lin Qingyu shook his head. "I was thinking of keeping him alive so as to serve as a sacrifice when you triumph."

Jiang Xing's eyes went a little cold. 【Forget it. It will only mar my battle banner. 】

Lin Qingyu was stunned. He threw off the quilt and made to get out of bed. "Then I'll go and take his life right now so as not to dirty your banner."

There was an uncomfortable feeling in Jiang Xing's chest. He smiled and called out "Baobei". He put his previous notes to the candle to burn them. He pulled

over another stack of paper and wrote: 【Let's not talk about him right now. Let's talk about something important.】

Lin Qingyu watched him write seriously and asked, "What would you like to talk about?"

【Qingyu, although it was in a dream, we did consummate our marriage, right?】

【Why don't we review that? How did it feel?】

After Jiang Xing finished writing, he waited nervously and expectantly for Lin Qingyu's answer. He almost couldn't bear it and nearly took it back but in order not to make Lin Qingyu angry, he forcefully overcame his instinct.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "It seemed like…it hurt."

Jiang Xing: …

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes and smiled, "But when I think about how it's you, it also feels really good."

The corners of Jiang Xing's lips rose up in a smile and he wrote, with lively and vigorous flourishes: 【I also felt really good. It felt amazing inside you, Baobei. I like it a lot.】

Lin Qingyu looked at the "dirty talk and obscene language" all over the paper

and his cheeks flushed slightly. What Lin Qingyu didn't know was that Jiang Xing's face was also burning hot. The outwardly seventeen-year-old boy who had written these filthy words with his own hand, was, in his heart, no less nervous and embarassed.

It's a pity that Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu had made love while weighed down with despair at that time. No matter how much physical pleasure there had been, it was always covered by a layer of gloom.

But it didn't matter. He believed that he and Lin Qingyu would be able to move past that.

Lin Qingyu put away Jiang Xing's note and said in a low voice, "We can't let others see this." He was about to burn the paper when his wrist was suddenly grabbed and then Jiang Xing was moving in closer.

Jiang Xing was about to kiss him.

Lin Qingyu's pupils reflected Xiao Li's face. He wanted to close his eyes like last time, but it was too late. His body froze instinctively and he turned his face to avoid the kiss.

Jiang Xing let him go. Feeling a little wronged, he picked up a brush and slowly

drew on the paper: 【? 】

【No kissing? 】

Lin Qingyu composed himself and said, “I seem to be a little uncomfortable with your current body.”

【Eh? But this body is the most similar to my original one. 】

“I know.” Lin Qingyu was a little distressed, “It’s just that I know Xiao Li.”

Before Jiang Xing became Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou, he had never met these two people and he could more easily accept that Jiang Xing had their appearance. But he knew Xiao Li. Not only did he know Xiao Li but he often spent time with him this year. Xiao Li would smile at him whenever he fed him. And he had personally put on Xiao Li the crown symbolizing his position as emperor. To him, Xiao Li really existed.

Jiang Xing understood what Lin Qingyu wanted to express and wrote: 【When I transferred to Xiao Li’s body, Xu Junyuan said it was “the soul returning to its old body”. You can think of me and Xiao Li as the same person

because for some reason, my soul wandered outside for a while and only now came back.】

Lin Qingyu looked at him: "Well, now that you're back, does that mean you won't leave again anymore?"

【Definitely.】

Seeing Jiang Xing being so sure, Lin Qingyu suppressed his restlessness and anxiety and smiled lightly. "I'll get used to it as soon as possible. If you kiss me again, I won't avoid it anymore."

Jiang Xing smiled and pecked Lin Qingyu's lips, light like a dragonfly skimming the water. A bit of haze, though, remained in Lin Qingyu's eyes.

Lin Qingyu said he couldn't control it but he was still trying to control it even now. As everyone knows, a beauty who is quiet and does not cry or make a fuss is more distressing than a beauty who is emotionally broken.

Lin Qingyu has been recuperating for three days and on the surface, he has already recovered. For the past few days, the Empress Dowager has been governing from behind the curtain but she was already showing signs that she was reaching her limit. Having learned that Lin Qingyu has almost recovered, under the cover of visiting the sick, she insinuated, "Qingyu, you need to get

better soon. There are many matters that Aijia has been waiting on your decision for."

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "Thank you, Your Highness, for your concern."

The Empress Dowager sighed, "There has been no news from the Northwest for a long time. I wonder how Gu Fuzhou fared in the battle for Yongliang."

Lin Qingyu's expression suddenly changed and his breathing turned rapid. With Lin Qingyu's current state, how could he bear to hear this? In order to prevent the empress dowager from continuing on, Jiang Xing said, "Mother."

The empress dowager suddenly froze, thinking that she had heard wrong. "… Li'er?"

Jiang Xing called again, "Mother."

"The emperor spoke?" The empress dowager was very excited, tears started streaming down her cheeks. Gone was her usual dignified and graceful manner. "The emperor called Aijia 'mother'!"

Nurse Xiujiao was also choked up, "This is the first thing the emperor has said. The emperor has truly kept you in his heart!"

The Empress Dowager couldn't restrain herself and she fell bitterly on Jiang Xing's shoulder. "Li'er, you really are getting better…Mother, mother has

waited so long for this day."

It was impossible for Jiang Xing to pretend to be a dullard all his life. But he also couldn't suddenly become a normal person. There had to be a gradual process. Today he called his mother, next year he will be reciting poems and in three to five years he will be able to do math problems.

【You know, playing a dullard's not so bad. 】Jiang Xing told Lin Qingyu, 【Besides, I don't feel much like talking to anyone except you. 】

Jiang Xing's "mother" had caused the empress dowager to cry until she was out of breath and couldn't even go to court the next day. Lin Qingyu changed into his official uniform and sat in front of a bronze mirror. He looked at himself with a blank expression. Suddenly, feelings of being fed up unexpectedly welled up.

Before he could be discovered by Jiang Xing, he immediately closed his eyes.

——Forget it. Jiang Xing has returned. Worrying about personal gains and losses, crying and wailing, how am I any different from Xiao Jie and his ilk? Do you want to become the kind of person you despise the most?

But, was Jiang Xing really back? Could it be that he was dreaming again? Once he wakes from his dream, Jiang Xing would leave too.

Lin Qingyu opened his eyes and saw through the bronze mirror the emperor standing behind him, helping him adjust his official hat. He quietly picked up

the hairpin on the table and slowly stabbed the sharp end into his palm.

Pain…It's not a dream. That's great.

Before Lin Qingyu could breathe a sigh of relief, the hairpin in his hand was snatched away by Jiang Xing.

"Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu paused and said, "Your Majesty."

Jiang Xing's brow furrowed and then loosened. He said with a smile, "I'm Jiang Xing. Don't-don't forget."

After practicing hard for a few days, he gradually regained the feeling of speaking and was able to speak short sentences.

The corners of Lin Qingyu's lips twitched. "I remember. Jiang Xing is the emperor now. So it's only right that I address you as such."

Jiang Xing lowered his head to check the wound on Lin Qingyu's palm. Fortunately, he had spotted it in time. Though the skin was broken, it wasn't bleeding. Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "It's fine. I'll just apply some medicine to it."

Lin Qingyu called Xiao Songzi to bring the medicine box and calmly applied the medicine on himself. Jiang Xing looked at him thoughtfully for a while, but

he didn't help him. Suddenly, Jiang Xing raised his hand to take off the jade crown on his head. He picked up the scissors lying to one side and cut off his long hair without hesitation.

Strands of black hair fell to the ground and within a short while, the young man's hair changed from long to short.

Lin Qingyu sat dazed for a long time before saying, "Jiang Xing…?"

Jiang Xing curved his lips into a smile, "Yes, Baobei?"

Lin Qingyu said in a daze, "What are you doing…why did you make yourself to look like this?"

Jiang Xing had messed up his hair. It was all uneven lengths, like a dog had chewed it. Fortunately, with his face, even with such a mess for hair, he was still extremely handsome and radiant.

…Exactly the same as Jiang Xing in his dream.

He watched with his own eyes how the long-haired "Xiao Li" completely transformed into the short-haired Jiang Xing.

He still remembered how when Jiang Xing lowered his head, the bangs on his forehead brushed against his eyelashes.

Jiang Xing tried hard to speak, but forgot how to say that word. He had no

choice but to resign himself to writing and holding up. 【I'm more handsome this way.】

After several days of being in a trance, Lin Qingyu finally regained his sense of reality and the voice in his ear became clear.

Jiang Xing got down on one knee in front of Lin Qingyu. He looked up at him, "Qingyu, it's me, Jiang Xing."

Lin Qingyu involuntarily stretched out his hand and cupped Jiang Xing's face, as if relieved, as if trusting, as if sighing. "You're really back."

Jiang Xing struggled to speak. "I've been back for a few days."

The mist in Lin Qingyu's eyes gradually dissipated and clarity returned. He suddenly pinched Jiang Xing's chin tight with his hand, his eyes turned sharp. "Oh, so you actually know how to come back, huh!"

Jiang Xing didn't feel any pain at all but pretended to frown tightly. "Be gentle, Baobei."

At this time, Xiao Songzi's voice came from outside. "Master Lin, Master Li and the others are waiting to discuss matters with you in Qinzheng Hall."

Lin Qingyu's eyes darkened. He looked around and tore a strip of cloth from the curtain. Jiang Xing consciously and even feeling a bit of excitement,

stretched out his hands. “Here.”

Lin Qingyu tied Jiang Xing’s hands with the cloth strip. “Go to the bed and wait for me under the quilt. You are not allowed to go anywhere until I come back.”

Did such a good thing actually exist in this world?

Jiang Xing nodded happily.

Chapter 106

Stepping back into Qinzheng Hall after a few days of absence, Lin Qingyu hesitated in front of its doors. Xiao Songzi asked, “Master Lin, is something the matter?”

Lin Qingyu pulled himself together and said, “No, let’s go in.”

As soon as Lin Qingyu entered the hall, the gathered ministers in the hall who had been sitting and drinking tea stood up and saluted him. Even those with higher official positions than him also saluted him with equal respect. Lin Qingyu returned the salute and took the lead in asking the Chief Justice of the Imperial Court, “How goes the investigation of Xixia’s agents?”

Xiao Songzi served tea to Lin Qingyu. Seeing him discuss official matters in a calm and indifferent tone, his worried heart was finally put at ease. Master Lin’s condition during the past two days had been terrifying to watch. He couldn’t imagine what great joy and great sorrow there could have been to stimulate Master Lin to the point of being sick in bed. Fortunately, Master Lin pulled through in the end.

Lin Qingyu had missed the morning court and all he political discussions of the past few days resulting in matters that needed attention that was several more time the amount than usual. In the beginning Lin Qingyu listened to them patiently but towards the end, he became more and more absent-minded.

He looked towards the door from time to time, as if he were in a hurry to confirm something.

A couple of hours later, Lin Qingyu couldn't sit still anymore and said, "That is it for today. The rest shall be discussed tomorrow."

Everyone filed out but Li Chan made to exit last. Lin Qingyu could see that he was dawdling on purpose probably because he wanted to speak to him alone.

"Master Li?"

Li Chan said, "Master Lin, it hasn't been long since His Majesty ascended to the throne and the position of prime minister remains vacant. We are a cabinet without a head. In my humble opinion, would it not be best for Master Lin to rise to this position early? By sitting in this highest of official positions, overseeing the court and managing government affairs would officially be part of your duties. In this way, the imperial censors won't gossip in private about

how Master Lin is overstepping his authority, arbitrarily deciding on matters of heaven and earth."

Lin Qingyu said indifferently, "These aren't the only things the imperial censors gossip about me in private. Let them talk. After all, all they ever dare to do is talk about it in private."

Li Chan hesitated and said, "But…"

"There is no need to rush this matter. When the time is right, I will make my own plans."

After simply looking at him for a while, Li Chan couldn't help talking about private matters, "I heard that Master Lin has been ill these past few days. Are you… all right?"

"I'm fine." Lin Qingyu said politely, "There is no need for Master Li to worry about me."

Hearing the sense of distance in Lin Qingyu's words, Li Chan forced a smile, "That's good then."

Lin Qingyu hurried all the way back to Xingqing Palace. He asked the eunuch guarding the door, "Is His Majesty still inside?"

The eunuch replied, "Yes. An hour ago, the Empress Dowager came to visit the

Emperor. Seeing that the Emperor was sleeping soundly, Her Highness left."

Lin Qingyu walked into the bedroom. He saw no sign of Jiang Xing on the bed, only a bulging ball.

Probably because he heard his approaching footsteps, Jiang Xing poked his head out of the quilt. Quilt draped over his head, his messy short hair squashed

flat, sleepy and handsome, with the cloth strips still tying his hands together, he yawned. “I waited for you, so long.”

It was impossible for Xiao Li to have this kind of temperament. No matter how big the world, only Jiang Xing himself could infuriate Lin Qingyu and also make him want to pamper him.

Lin Qingyu’s shoulders imperceptivity relaxed. “You were waiting for me?”

“Wait for you.” Jiang Xing added, “I’m hungry.”

There was something cute about a Jiang Xing who couldn’t quite speak fluently. Lin Qingyu smiled lightly and asked, “What do you want to eat?”

Jiang Xing frowned and thought for a while. He then spread open Lin Qingyu’s palm and wrote the word “plum blossom” on it.

Lin Qingyu said, “We haven’t got any made by Mother. Only one made by the Shangshi Bureau. Will that do?”

Jiang Xing thought for a while and said, “Yes, I’ll make do.” As he spoke, he raised his tied hands and motioned for Lin Qingyu to help him untie them.

“No.” Lin Qingyu opened the door and ordered the maid to prepare the food. He then sat down beside the bed and said, “Let me ask you, how did Gu

Fuzhou die?”

He had asked this question once before. At that time, he was distraught and Jiang Xing brushed aside the questions with a perfunctory answer. When he had calmed down and thought about it, if Jiang Xing really had done as he had promised, staying behind the line and involving himself only in planning strategies then how did Gu Fuzhou find himself dying ont he battlefield as they recovered Yongliang?

Jiang Xing was startled, lowered his hands and sighed, “Back to normal Qingyu is so fierce.”

Just before Lin Qingyu left, he wasn’t quite in control of himself and so had tied it a little too tight. Jiang Xing’s current body wasn’t as use to abuse as Gu Fuzhou’s and he was used to being pampered. After a couple of hours of being

up like this, a mark had appeared on his wrist. Lin Qingyu stroked the two pink marks and said, “If you tell me the truth, I will untie it for you.”

Jiang Xing said, “It’s long. Can’t say it.”

Lin Qingyu took a pen and paper and untied the cloth strip from around Jiang Xing’s wrists. “Then write.”

Jiang Xing knew he was doomed. Even if he doesn’t write it now, Lin Qingyu will still know everything when news from the Northwest reaches the capital.

Jiang Xing took the brush. Lin Qingyu thought he was going to write on the desk, but this person lay down on the bed and started writing under the quilt, like a student who nromally didn’t seem to put in any effort but secretly worked hard whilst in bed in the middle of the night.

As soon as Jiang Xing stopped writing, Lin Qingyu took the paper away. Lin Qingyu’s eyes skimmed across the paper. His brows furrowed and his face

turned frighteningly cold. Jiang Xing felt like a student whose teacher was checking his homework.

"You used yourself as bait…" Lin Qingyu chuckled, "So, you never had any intention of keeping your promise, did you, Jiang Gongzi?"

Jiang Xing laughed as though mocking himself. "Unjust accusation."

"If you did, how could you have put yourself in danger?"

Jiang Xing was unable to explain it. In retrospect, he also felt that at the time, the whole thing had gone to his head. Now, if he could redo his choices, he might not do it. But at that time, having been in the Northwest for a year,

witnessing the deaths of thousands of his brothers under the walls of Yongliang, he was somewhat overwhelmed.

However, telling these things to Lin Qingyu was useless. He decided to adopt the simplest and crudest solution. He knelt on the bed, put his hands together and said loudly: “I was wrong! Next time, don’t dare!”

Lin Qingyu was unmoved and said indifferently, “I believed you when you promised me before. You think I’ll believe you again?”

Jiang Xing was dumbfounded.

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly. “From now on, I’m done trusting you. I will only trust myself.”

He won’t let Jiang Xing leave his control. He won’t let Jiang Xing go anywhere he couldn’t see. He was fed up with that feeling.

Jiang Xing smiled and wrote: [Then Baobei, please protect me. Don’t let me go to war, it’s scary. 】

Lin Qingyu was silent and then asked, “Were you…were you scared?”

“It was alright.” Jiang Xing wrote casually. He lifted open the brocade quilt and invited Lin Qingyu, “Come in, sit.”

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment before getting into the quilt. A familiar

breath instantly surrounded him.

When he was with Xiao Li before, he never felt this breath. This was something Jiang Xing brought with him. Whether he was Lu Wancheng, Gu Fuzhou or Xiao Li, the feeling Jiang Xing gave him would never change.

Not long after, Xiao Songzi brought in the plum blossom cake. Seeing the emperor's short hair Xiao Songzi was horrified. "The emperor — the emperor's hair…"

Lin Qingyu said, "His Majesty toyed with his hair and cut it off. It's no great matter. Do not make a fuss over nothing."

Jiang Xing looked in the mirror and couldn't bear to look at himself straight. He picked up the scissors and trimmed it, finally making it into something

more presentable. Looking at the short-haired boy in the mirror, he couldn't help sighing with feeling, "I feel like I'm back."

Lin Qingyu had to admit that short hair on men seemed more refreshing and convenient compared to long hair. If given the chance, he would also like to give it a try.

Lin Qingyu said, "Look up."

Though perplexed, Jiang Xing nevertheless raised his head. Lin Qingyu touched his Adam's apple, "You in the dream had a mole here too."

Jiang Xing was surprised: 【You don't remember my appearance in the dream so how do you still remember this mole? 】

"Because from my perspective, I can always this part of you here."

Jiang Xing carefully savored Lin Qingyu's words. He put his chin against his cheek and smiled, "Huh? I don't understand."

Lin Qingyu glanced at him. "His Majesty is still young. When you grow up, you'll understand."

Since Jiang Xing begun speaking, the Empress Dowager was obviously not as concerned about court affairs as before. Most of her energy was poured into taking care of Jiang Xing. Every day, she would stay in Xingqing Palace for

most of the day, personally teaching Jiang Xing to speak. It seemed that to her, Jiang Xing truly was as a babbling child.

“Li’er, you are the emperor. You should call yourself ‘Zhen’.” The Empress Dowager said, “Come on, follow Mother and say, ‘Zhen’.”

Jiang Xing looked at Lin Qingyu helplessly, hoping that Lin Qingyu could help him send the Empress Dowager away. Lin Qingyu pretended not to see and calmly opened another report.

The empress dowager who did not get any response from her son continued her efforts, “Li’er, say ‘Zhen’…”

Jiang Xing had no choice but to say “Zhen”. The empress dowager was immediately overjoyed. “Li’er is so amazing and smart.” Based on this level of

fuss, it was as though Jiang Xing had composed a masterpiece that had never been seen before or ever will be since, “Qingyu, don’t you think so?”

Lin Qingyu responded flatly. “Yes.”

Seeing that he was busy with official matters, the empress dowager wondered, “Qingyu, if you want to read those reports, why don’t you go to Qinzheng Hall?”

Lin Qingyu was somewhat startled and said softly, “I…”

He knew it wasn’t right but he couldn’t help it.

Jiang Xing said, “Mother, I want him stay.”

In front of her talking son, the empress dowager threw all her principles out the window. “Of course, Qingyu shall accompany the emperor.” She paused

and added, “However, after General Gu returns, the emperor can’t be so clingy to Qingyu anymore, alright?”

Just as the empress dowager mentioned Gu Fuzhou, Xiao Songzi ran in, panting, “Your Majesty, Your Highness, Master Lin, a messenger from the Northwest is here!”

The empress dowager hurriedly said, “Quickly, quickly! Have him come in!”

Jiang Xing looked at Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu seemed calm but his fingers clutching the report had gone white.

Fortunately, Lin Qingyu already knew. Otherwise, he really couldn’t imagine the madness Lin Qingyu would experience hearing the news of Gu Fuzhou’s death from someone else.

Jiang Xing quietly tugged on Lin Qingyu’s sleeve and mouthed “Baobei”. Lin Qingyu shook his head, indicating that he was fine.

After a while, Shen Huaishi walked in.

It was already a year since he last saw him. Shen Huaishi had become thinner, more tanned. He was travel-stained, and his eyes were bloodshot. It was easy to see that he had ridden here without stopping for rest.

Shen Huaishi knelt down in front of them and said in a hoarse voice, “We’ve

secured victory in the Northwest. Yongliang is once again ours."

The empress dowager breathed a sigh of relief and said with a smile, "Gu Fuzhou has lived up to everyone's expectations. As soon as the emperor ascended the throne, he pacified the Northwest. He is worthy of his name as a Commander General of the country. Qingyu, you have married a good husband."

Lin Qingyu asked, "If we've won a great victory, why can't I see any joy on your face?"

Shen Huaishi raised his head and looked at Lin Qingyu, his voice was choked with sobs, "Imperial Physician Lin, I'm sorry. General Gu…" Shen Huaishi slammed his head against the floor and said as though shedding tears of blood, "General Gu…died in battle!"

The empress dowager's eyes went round and she staggered to a sit in a daze. Several of the palace maid covered their mouths as their gasped. Xiao Songzi, who had admired the general for a long time, immediately burst into tears.

Xiao Songzi's sobs echoed in the hall. Lin Qingyu glanced at Jiang Xing, who had on a complicated expression. And then he said, "I see."

Shen Huaishi: "…?"

The author has something to say: The new emperor: General, go with peace of mind, I will take good care of the beautiful little widow.

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Chapter 107

Back then, Lin Qingyu had been widowed from Lu Wancheng for less than a year when Gu Fuzhou insisted on marrying him, by hook or by crook, heedless of the rumors of the inauspiciousness of taking a male wife. After their marriage, the two held the tray level with the brow, they were qin and se playing in perfect harmony. The eunuchs and maids in the palace often saw Gu Fuzhou drop by the Imperial Hospital to pick up his wife. Conversely, they occasionally saw Lin Qingyu waiting for his husband outside the palace. It showed the deep love between this pair of husband and wife.

Now greeted with the tragic news of Gu Fuzhou's death in battle, even Xiao Songzi shed tears for him but Lin Qingyu shed not a single tear. The only thing he had to offer were a bland couple of words — "I see."

Except for Jiang Xing, everyone was still immersed in the tragic news. Hearing what Lin Qingyu said, no one could react and they stared red-eyed at him.

Especially Shen Huaishi, he'd been entrusted by Lin Qingyu to accompany Gu Fuzhou to the Northwest and keep him safe. He has stayed by Gu Fuzhou's side for a year and he knew the depths of Gu Fuzhou's love for Lin Qingyu. He thought that Lin Qingyu would be furious, would collapse completely, would abandon himself to despair. Shen Huashi had been preparing himself to

apologize with his death. But Lin Qingyu presented him a reaction that he never could have imagined.

Jiang Xing sighed silently as he looked at Shen Huaishi's bleeding forehead and everyone else's astonished expressions. Lin Qingyu had already collapsed once and had almost lost his mind. The current Lin Qingyu didn't even have the strength to put on an act. The only thing he could do was revert back to how he was like before and hide everything under a calm surface.

Lin Qingyu was never one to expose his vulnerable side to others, he was the sole exception.

In the end, it was the empress dowager who broke the strange silence. "General Gu had superb martial skills. He had extraordinary ability and he was also the commander of the army. How could he have died in battle while recapturing Yongliang!?"

Shen Huaishi came back to his senses and said in a quiet voice, "Yongliang was well-defended and our army had been unable to breach it for a long time. In

order to reduce the casualties among the soldiers, General Gu did not hesitate…to lure the enemy army out of the city by putting himself in danger."

When Shen Huaishi said this, everyone present was moved. The sound of sobbing was endless. Xiao Songzi was so out of breath from crying that he seemed about to faint.

"General Wu, Wu Youyuan, set up an ambush ahead of time. He was supposed to attack with General Gu, catching the enemy in a pincher attack. Who could have expected…" Shen Huaishi had to close his eyes for a moment to compose himself before he could continue, "Who would have thought that General Wu would encounter an avalanche on his way to provide support. He was blocked outside the pass. General Gu waited for a long time for reinforcements to arrive. He died rid—"

A light cough interrupted Shen Huaishi's recounting. Jiang Xing tugged at the empress dowager's sleeve and said, "Mother, I'm hungry."

The Empress Dowager said, voice hoarse, "Xiu Jiao, take the Emperor to get some snacks."

Xiu Jiao momo wiped away the tears from her face. She was about to take Jiang Xing when Jiang Xing spoke up once again, "I want to eat here, with Mother."

The empress dowager suddenly felt gratified and said with a tearful smile, "The Emperor now even knows that he must be filial to his mother… General

Gu was a pillar of our country. He was loyal to the emperor and he loved this nation. The Dayu has been crippled with his loss. The Emperor must also feel sad for General Gu, don't you ?"

Jiang Xing's intention was too obvious. Lin Qingyu complied with his wishes for the time being and did not expose him. He asked Shen Huaishi, "Where is the General's body now?"

Shen Huaishi looked up at Lin Qingyu, dazed. After a while, he said, "Three days after I left, General Shi, Shi Pei, begun the journey to personally escort

General Gu's body back to the capital. General Wu is staying in Yongliang, awaiting orders."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "I will personally see to the arrangements of the General's funeral."

"Qingyu," the empress dowager couldn't help but say, "If you feel distressed in your heart, you mustn't hold it in lest you hurt your body."

Lin Qingyu said, "I thank Her Highness for her concern."

The empress dowager sighed, "You may go ahead then. Call on the Ministry of Rites and you may make the arrangements for General Gu's funeral together."

Lin Qingyu looked at Jiang Xing and said softly, "This minister…will not go."

Hearing this, the corners of Jiang Xing's lips rose slightly. This Lin Qingyu was really clingy. And he f*cking loves it.

The empress dowager thought she had heard wrong. "What?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Minister Xuan of the Ministry of Rites can come to the Xingqing Palace. Huaishi, you have travelled all the way here without stopping

for rest. You have worked hard. Xiao Songzi, take Shen Gongzi to the side hall for a bath and a change of clothes. Later, I have something to ask him. ”

After finally seeing the Empress Dowager off to Ci'an Palace, Lin Qingyu then dismissed the rest. He asked Jiang Xing, “Why wouldn't you let Shen Huaishi continue speaking?”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “A misunderstanding.” In the past few days, his speaking has become more and more natural in front of Lin Qingyu. “I was really hungry just now.”

Lin Qingyu threw him a somewhat accusatory look. “You're lying to me again.”

“What do you want to hear from Shen Huaishi? How I died?” Jiang Xing said helplessly, “I've already told you how, Qingyu.”

“In that case, what does it matter if Shen Huaishi recounts it again?”

Jiang Xing was momentarily at a loss for words. Seeing that Lin Qingyu would not be dissuaded, he suddenly smiled and said, “Shen Huaishi isn't the articulate sort. He wouldn't be able to express it very well. He can't express my misery before my death. Look, let's do it this way. I'll act it out for you.”

Lin Qingyu frowned. “How do you want to do it?”

“You play Shen Huaishi and I'll play Gu Fuzhou.” Jiang Xing's expression suddenly changed as he said that. He covered his chest, vividly re-creating the

expression he had when he was shot by arrows that day. He gave an “ugh” and fell onto Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu instinctively moved to catch him and they both were sent kneeling on the ground. Jiang Xing lay in Lin Qingyu’s arms. Holding his hand, he said with difficulty, “Save me, I wrote him a letter of guarantee. He’s still waiting for me, I can’t lie to him…”

Lin Qingyu hesitated.

Before Jiang Xing died, all he could think about was the promise he had made to him. He should feel moved and he should be weeping bitterly. But why was it that although he did feel moved, he also felt… a little like laughing?

Jiang Xing looked at Lin Qingyu, filled with deep love. “Don’t let me die, he’ll cry.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

“Please, save me. You must save me… ah.” With that ‘ah’, Jiang Xing let go of his hand and fell heavily against Lin Qingyu’s chest, his eyes open. He lay motionless like a corpse.

Seeing that he wasn’t responding, Lin Qingyu asked, “And then?”

“And then I died.” Though the performance was done, Jiang Xing didn’t get up. He took this opportunity to lie in his wife’s arms and be lazy. He played with

the strands of Lin Qingyu's long hair that were hanging down on Lin Qingyu's chest, "That was a faithful reenactment. If you don't believe me, go ask Shen Huaishi."

Lin Qingyu couldn't help smiling. "I believe you."

"Then why don't you look the least bit moved?" Jiang Xing stared at him, "Your eyes aren't even red. You're just too much."

Lin Qingyu told him honestly. "I really don't feel much like crying."

Jiang Xing's goal had been achieved but he still said teasingly, "No, Qingyu, that's not fair. I showed such deep love but it didn't even make you the teeniest bit like crying? So love can disappear, huh?"

Lin Qingyu fiddled with the young man's short hair. "Love cannot disappear. It has only transferred from the General to the Emperor."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "That makes sense."

Even though Jiang Xing had acted it out so clearly, Lin Qingyu still called Shen Huaishi to meet with him. Shen Huaishi had been waiting for a long time, thinking that he would be talking to Lin Qingyu alone. But when he entered

the hall, he found that although Lin Qingyu had indeed sent away all unconcerned parties, he had let the Emperor alone stay."

Shen Huaishi had not known about the change in leadership until he arrived at the capital. He didn't know much about the new emperor, only that the new emperor was mentally incomplete and had been raised in Jinyang Garden before. So although he had grown up in the palace, he hadn't seen the prince much. Today he was able to see the emperor's face. Even though his body was burdened and his heart was heavy, he still noticed that the emperor's

outstanding appearance; he looked somewhat better than General Gu; a match for Lin Qingyu, boasting it's own merits.

But what shocked Shen Huaishi the most was not the emperor's appearance, nor his strange short hair, but the way Lin Qingyu looked at him.

Lin Qingyu was cold and indifferent. How could there be anyone else besides Gu Fuzhou who could get him to treat them tenderly?

Shen Huaishi's thoughts were running wildly when he heard Lin Qingyu say, "Last year, when I asked you to go to the Northwest, I asked you to do only one thing and that is to protect the General and ensure his safe return."

When Lin Qingyu spoke, Jiang Xing was sitting next to him, listening to the conversation between the two, while playing with the reports to the emperor, stacking the scrolls into a tall pyramid.

Shen Huaishi bowed his head and said, "I accepted Master Lin's trust and I have let down both you and the General. I will accept whatever punishment Master Lin wishes to bestow upon me."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Did you try your utmost best?"

Shen Huaishi gritted his teeth and said in a deep voice, "I only hate that I could not have died in the General's place."

Every moment after Gu Fuzhou's death, he had thought about how much

better if would be if he had died instead. He was alone, with no attachments. No one would suffer if he died. Exchanging his life for Gu Fuzhou's, this pillar of the Dayu, would have been a worthwhile exchange.

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "That you could do this for him, for the Dayu, what can I blame you for?"

Shen Huaishi suddenly raised his head. He looked at Lin Qingyu as if he were looking at a stranger.

Lin Qingyu asked further, "What are your plans for the future? I know you don't want to stay in the capital. If you wish to go back to the frontier, I can arrange it for you."

"I…" Shen Huaishi swallowed, "I want to stay in the capital for the time being, to see General Gu off on his final journey."

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. "As you wish. In addition, I will give an explanation to the soldier in the Northwest regarding the robbery of the provisions."

Now that the conversation has reached this point, it was almost time to end. Seeing that Shen Huaishi was still in a daze, Lin Qingyu asked, "Is there anything else?"

After hesitating for a long time, Shen Huaishi said, "Master Lin, before General Gu's death, he told me a lot…" Shen Huaishi clenched his hands into fists, "He begged me, begged me to save him. He said he had promised you that he would

return to your side. I'm useless, I couldn't save him…I could only watch him as he died with eyes wide open, I couldn't do anything…"

By the end of his speech, Shen Huaishi's eyes had begun to blur. He was choked with sobs.

Lin Qingyu still said the same two words. "I see."

Shen Huaishi was stunned. "…Master Lin?"

"Because he promised me, he desperately wanted to live. But in the end, he still didn't come back. So, I can still blame him and I do." Lin Qingyu sneered, "I will blame him for the rest of my life."

Shen Huaishi fell silent. Tears fell from his cheeks and dripped onto the backs of his weather-beaten hands.

He originally thought that no matter how cold Lin Qingyu was, he would treat Gu Fuzhou differently. He was the one who misread Lin Qingyu.

Or maybe, I never understood him at all.

Shen Huaizhi couldn't bear it anymore, and said as if calling him into account, "With Master Lin like this, how can you be worthy of the pain and agony the General suffered when thousands of arrows pierced his heart?"

Lin Qingyu's eyes grew wide and he suddenly looked at Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing

inwardly cursed his luck. The house of scrolls he had spent a long time building suddenly collapsed.

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Chapter 108

By the time Shen Huaishi withdrew, it had already gone dark outside. Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing looked at each other without saying a word, separated by the scattered scrolls.

Feeling the coldness radiating from Lin Qingyu's body, Jiang Xing panicked a little. He'd made Lin Qingyu distressed again. He wasn't afraid of Lin Qingyu being angry with him, but he was afraid of being unable to coax him.

Jiang Xing was worrying about how to coax him when Xiu Jiao momo came in and reminded Lin Qingyu, "Master Lin, it's about time for His Majesty to head to bed."

It was already a violation of the rules for the emperor and his minister to live together in Xingqing Palace. If they were even going to sleep together in the same room, even the Empress Dowager would not agree. For the past few days, Lin Qingyu has been staying in the side hall, only a few steps away from the emperor's bedroom. But even still, he sometimes felt it wasn't enough.

When he couldn't fall asleep, after waking up from a dream, he would go to the main hall to take a look, just to make sure that Jiang Xing was still there.

At this moment, he didn't want to let Jiang Xing go. And so he blurted out, "He can't go."

Xiu Jiao momo was so frightened by Lin Qingyu's cold tone that she didn't even dare to breathe too loud. Master Lin wasn't easy to get along with even at

the best of times and now, he had just lost his husband. He must be in a terrible frame of mind. Who would dare to provoke him at a time like this?

Jiang Xing said slowly, “Withdraw for now.”

Xiu Jiao momo was stunned. When did the Emperor start sounding like a grown man? Even one with the air of one used to being followed? She didn’t have time to think about it. She bowed and retreated.

Jiang Xing looked carefully at Lin Qingyu’s expression. He said coldly, “Jiang Xing, sure enough, you are a great big liar. Just how many things are you hiding from me?”

Lin Qingyu frowned, “Are you play-acting me now?”

Jiang Xing wound his arms around Lin Qingyu’s waist, smiled and pulled him into his arms. “I’m just speaking for you. You know, so you can rest for a while.”

Lin Qingyu whispered, “You said… it was quick.”

“And it really was very quick. Thousands of arrows pierced my heart. How can it not be quick?” Jiang Xing said half-truthfully, “To be honest, I think this way of dying is quite pleasant, much better than dying slowly from illness.”

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes, tightly gripped his fingers. “That wasn’t a faithful

reenactment."

"Oh?"

"I won't call you a big liar."

Jiang Xing suddenly said, "That's right, you should call me a 'brute'."

Lin Qingyu paused and said, "Jiang Xing, you great big idiot."

Jiang Xing laughed out loud, "Baobei, you aren't angry anymore?" This coaxing task was a lot easier than he expected.

Lin Qingyu shook his head. "I can't bring myself to get angry anymore." He lowered his head and leaned on Jiang Xing's shoulder. His voice trembling

slightly, “Why do you always have to suffer like that? It happened to Lu Wancheng and even as Gu Fuzhou you couldn’t escape it.”

Jiang Xing smiled. “I’m curious too. Why is it always me?” He said casually, “I don’t think I’ve done anything so atrocious as to offend the Heavens.”

Lin Qingyu’s shoulders stiffened and his eyes grew wide. Jiang Xing, who was holding him, immediately noticed his strange behavior. He looked down at him. “What’s wrong?”

Lin Qingyu held his breath and clung to him even tighter. “…It’s nothing. Can you not leave tonight?”

Jiang Xing carried Lin Qingyu and walked towards the bed, saying seriously, “General Gu died in battle and Madam Gu was suffering from a painful loss. He was grief-stricken and inconsolable. Allow Zhen to comfort you.”

Lin Qingyu buried her head in the crook of his neck and chuckled lightly, “Thank you, Your Majesty.”

Jiang Xing accompanied Lin Qingyu until he fell sleep. Once Lin Qingyu was sleeping sound, he quietly returned to the main hall. From the warm, fragrant and soft embrace, he returned bitterly to his cold bed.

He had to find a way to be able to sleep with Lin Qingyu openly and aboveboard. While they might be just sleeping next to each other in bed now, later on, if after making love he would still need to pull up his pants and leave,

well, that was just too miserable and truly proper scumbag behavior. But more importantly, running back and forth like this every night was really tiring.

The news of Gu Fuzhou's death spread in throughout the capital. Everyone in the city, from high to low, from civil and military officials to ordinary common fold, all sighed woefully. In the barracks, all these burly soldier had their eyes swollen from crying. When Wu Guogong heard the bad news, tears burst from his aged eyes and cried bitterly about how Heaven had no eyes. Wu Zhan was also overwhelmed with grief; the hair on his temples turned gray and he was no longer are lively and vigorous as before. Even some of the imperial censors who disliked Gu Fuzhou had to put on a show and shed a few hypocritical tears.

There were rumors that after the new emperor ascended the throne, he began to grow more familiar with human affairs. When he learned of Gu Fuzhou's death, it was as though he had lost an elder brother and he went so far as to cut off his hair as a sacrifice to be burned, to comfort Gu Fuzhou's spirit in heaven.

Lin Qingyu was Gu Fuzhou's widow and the only remaining master of the General's Mansion. He had no choice but to go back to the Mansion to oversee the funeral. He was dressed in mourning clothes of plain white, white like

snow; even the ribbon that held his hair was white, spotless and clear as icy jade.

Jiang Xing's eyes widened. He smiled and said, "Where did this beautiful little widow come from? Come here and give Zhen a hug."

Although Lin Qingyu cared nothing for worldly customs, he was wearing mourning clothes and being affectionate with another man while wearing this was a little too much even for him. "Don't make trouble." Lin Qingyu said, "I'll be heading back to the Mansion. You…"

Jiang Xing said, conscious of the situation, "I'll obediently wait for your return in the palace and I won't go anywhere."

Lin Qingyu nodded. After taking a couple of steps, he still felt worried and hurriedly turned back. "Do you want to go back to the Mansion to see the little Gu's? They've gotten very big…"

Jiang Xing smiled lazily. "Alright."

Lin Qingyu breathed a sigh of relief. He called in Xiao Songzi to help change Jiang Xing's clothes. "If the empress dowager asks, tell her that the emperor has already fallen asleep and it would be inconvenient for him to see visitors."

Jiang Xing changed into the attire of a normal son of nobility. His short hair was too eye-catching so Lin Qingyu put a hooded fox fur cape on him. No one

in the Gu Mansion had yet to see Xiao Li so they should not be able to recognize him.

The two got into the carriage and Jiang Xing joked, “Can you rely on Xiao Songzi to cover up for us? He is ‘Xiao Songzi’, after all.”

Lin Qingyu said, “He is very tight in front of me. He is a trustworthy person.”

Jiang Xing’s smile faded. “This…”

Outside the General’s Mansion, Yuan Yin had brought Huan Tong, Hua Lu, Zhang Shiquan and the others to await his arrival. Looking from a distance, they were a swath of bleak, plain white. Jiang Xing looked at the words “Gu Mansion” written on the white banner hanging over the gates and felt as though he were seeing something from a lifetime ago.

Ever since Jiang Xing entered the dream within Gu Fuzhou’s first seven days from death, Lin Qingyu had yet to return to the Gu Mansion. Yuan Yin was a

very capable person. After receiving the news, he held back his grief and set up the mourning hall, preparing everything. “Madam, you’re back.”

Huan Tong said with eyes turned red. “Young Master, is the General really…is he really gone? He was so powerful, how could he just be gone like that… Could they have made some sort of mistake?”

Lin Qingyu made no comment. He said, “Don’t stand around here. Let’s go in.”

Seeing the young man following Lin Qingyu, Yuan Yin was taken aback. He asked, “Madam, who might this be?”

“Do not mind him. Simply take it that he goes with me.”

Gu Fuzhou’s body had yet to arrive at the capital but there was already an endless stream of people who came to the Gu Mansion to offer their condolences. Most were Gu Fuzhou’s former subordinates and Lin Qingyu had to take great care to receive them. Jiang Xing was hidden away in the side hall by Lin Qingyu. Separated by a curtain, he fell asleep listening to the sound of sobbing and weeping. Until a loud voice rang out and jolted him awake.

“It was me! It was I who killed the General! If I hadn’t forced the General to take command of the Northwest, how could the General have ended up like

this! General, General, without you, what would the Dayu do in the future… I have became the Dayu's eternal sinner…"

Yuan Yin watched Wu Zhan wailing loudly, already losing control. He asked Lin Qingyu, "Madam, should you try to comfort General Wu?"

Lin Qingyu was kneeling in front of Gu Fuzhou's memorial tablet. "It's fine, let him cry."

While Wu Zhan howled all the way til dusk, many people came one after another. Zhang Shiquan announced each one to Lin Qingyu as they came. "Madam, Master Li from the Ministry of War is here."

There was only one 'Li' in a position of power within the Ministry of War — Li Chan. Jiang Xing had heard Lin Qingyu talk of Li Chan. Lin Qingyu's evaluation of him was "a person possessing of both within and without; can be

used". It was much higher than Xiao Songzi's evaluation. — F*cking 'possessing of both within and without'.

Jiang Xing lifted the curtain, just in time to see Li Chan walking into the mourning hall. With a handsome appearance and the strong style of a man of letters, he was indeed a young talent.

Li Chan held the lit incense sticks and bowed three times in front of Gu Fuzhou's memorial tablet. He then walked up to Lin Qingyu and said, "Master Lin."

Lin Qingyu nodded towards Li Chan. "Master Li."

Li Chan couldn't help reaching out his hand, wanting to lay it on that slender shoulder. As soon as he was about to touch, his hand dropped once again. In the end, he still didn't have that much courage. He only dared to use words to comfort him. "The dead cannot be brought back to life. I hope Master Lin can find it in himself to restrain his grief and accept this inevitable loss."

Jiang Xing chuckled. He let the curtain fall to a close, sat back and continued to drowse.

Hua Lu and Huan Tong knelt in front of the brazier burning paper money. The former muttered, "Why is the Young Master so calm?"

Huan Tong said, "You forgot, when Young Master Hou passed away, Young Master was also very calm. But in his heart, he must feel more aggrieved than

anyone else."

Hua Lu shook her head. "It's different." She could feel the subtle difference but she couldn't tell what exactly was different.

With the sunset, the guests gradually dispersed. According to the Dayu's customs, Lin Qingyu had to keep vigil for his deceased husband for three days.

Seeing that Lin Qingyu had dismissed all the servants, Jiang Xing came out of the side hall, yawning. Lin Qingyu cast a sidelong glance at him. "Will you light incense for yourself?"

"No." Jiang Xing leaned over and wrapped his arms around Lin Qingyu from behind. "Qingyu, I'm sleepy."

Lin Qingyu said, "Go back to your room and sleep then."

Jiang Xing said sleepily, "Come with me."

Lin Qingyu looked at Gu Fuzhou's memorial tablet and took Jiang Xing's arms away from his waist. "My apologies, Your Majesty but this minister cannot

accept your kind thoughts. I am still observing a mourning period for General Gu."

Jiang Xing closed his eyes and smiled. "Since aiqing said this, Zhen finds that he is no longer sleep. — how do you plan to observe this mourning period for General Gu?"

"At the very least, I won't be accompanying the Emperor to sleep under the General's roof."

"It doesn't matter." Jiang Xing's eyes were bright, as though brewing they were brewing something wicked beneath the surface. "We'll do it secretly. We won't let anyone find out."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"So, would you like to have a secret affair with me—Madam Gu?" The words "Madam Gu" were said with a rising tone, the ending sounding as though it carried an ambiguous smile.

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "This body of yours is not yet eighteen."

Jiang Xing was stunned. "…Huh?"

"I remember you said that in your hometown, there are many restrictions on men under the age of 18. They are not allowed to marry and have sex with

others." Lin Qingyu paused, "In addition, you also said that in your hometown, it's illegal to sleep with a dullard."

Jiang Xing tried to take back his words. "Did I say that?"

Lin Qingyu said, "You think I remembered wrong?"

"""But I'm not a dullard anymore. Besides, I'm in the Dayu now. Why should I follow the traditions of my hometown? Here, people who marry early could already have a second child by the time they're seventeen. Wait, wait. You're not actually planning to wait until this body of mine turns eighteen before you

have sex with me, right? It's rare for me to find something that I'm willing despite it being tiring. How can you dampen my enthusiasm like this?"

"

Seeing Jiang Xing's pained face, Lin Qingyu couldn't help but smile. While donned in mourning clothes, he smiled and Jiang Xing's heart burned so hot that he lowered his head, wanting to kiss him.

Lin Qingyu raised his hand to cover his lips. "Not here."

Jiang Xing grabbed his hand. "I insist."

When he kissed him, Lin Qingyu's heart suddenly rose and his body trembled. The candlelight cast a dim light. Jiang Xing was too close. Lin Qingyu couldn't see his face clearly, only a vague outline.

The word "preposterous" flashed in Lin Qingyu's mind. He put his hand on Jiang Xing's chest but he couldn't push him away.

Jiang Xing felt his attempt to push him away and laughed, "Baobei is so nervous — Is it because your deceased husband is watching?"

Before Lin Qingyu could refute his lips were once against blocked by Jiang Xing. He has never been an inflexible person; since he couldn't escape it, he might as well enjoy it with peace of mind. Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and the

mourning hall they were in disappeared, leaving only the gentle and warm touch, the young man's clean and natural scent.

Suddenly, there was a slight noise from a dark corner.

Jiang Xing slowly raised his eyes and turned towards the sound, only to see a figure leaving in a hurry. He couldn't see the man's face but just based on the back view, he already had an idea in his mind.

That this person left such a trace with his skills showed just how frightened he'd been.

Lin Qingyu was so weak from Jiang Xing's kiss that he hadn't heard anything. Because of his shortness of breath, a soft moan escaped from lips.

This moan made Jiang Xing's breath catch. He immediately put the matter behind him, lowered his eyes and concentrated on kissing the mourning beauty in his arms.

Chapter 109

Jiang Xing couldn't stay outside the palace for very long. After kissing the little widow, he went to see the Second Young Lady Gu and the Third Young Master Gu. When he'd left for the Northwest, these two had only been the size of fingernails, but now they are as thick and long as his fingers. It showed how

much Lin Qingyu cared for them. After that, Jiang Xing took advantage of cover of night to return to the palace.

Xiao Songzi assisted him in changing his clothes. Even Lin Qingyu praised Xiao Songzi for being tight-lipped. He considered this little eunuch useful. Thus, naturally, Jiang Xing trusted him too. “Xiao Songzi.”

Xiao Songzi said, “Your Majesty?”

“Go and find Shen Huaishi for Zhen.”

Xiao Songzi was dumbstruck. It was his first time hearing His Majesty say so many words in one go. And it had none of its usual childlike tone. He sounded no different from ordinary people. Was the emperor suddenly fully recovered?

Jiang Xing smiled. “Why, did you not understand?”

Xiao Songzi came back to his senses and hurriedly said, “This servant shall go immediately.”

“Also,” Though Jiang Xing’s tone was gentle, it seemed to carry a hint of warning, “Zhen trusts that you won’t tell anyone aside from Master Lin of what Zhen says or does within the palace.”

Xiao Songzi gulped. “This servant is His Majesty’s to command.”

Shen Huaishi has always been elusive. Even when tasked personally by the

Emperor, Xiao Songzi still had to use a lot of effort to bring him to the palace. With only an hour left before dawn, Shen Huaishi was ordered to come to Xingqing Palace. The person who sent the message said that it was the Emperor who issued the summons. But how could His Majesty want to see him for no reason? It must be Lin Qingyu, using the name of the emperor, who summoned him.

Lin Qingyu and the son of heaven… Thinking of what he'd seen just now, a haze begun to cover Shen Huaishi's eyes and he quietly clenched his hands into fists.

No wonder Lin Qingyu could so calmly face the news of General Gu's death. Long before General Gu died in battle, he and the new emperor must have already been…

But the General still thought of no one but Lin Qingyu. Even during his last moments, all he thought about was Lin Qingyu.

Shen Huaishi forcibly suppressed the resentment in his heart and stepped into the hall. He fully expected to see Lin Qingyu inside; unexpectedly, he was met with the sight of the Emperor alone. The young man had on him the black

dragon robe. He was seated atop the throne, his forehead resting against his fist, his eyes closed in a doze.

Xiao Songzi said, “Your Majesty, Shen Gongzi is here.”

Jiang Xing opened his eyes and said with a smile, “Shen Gongzi has kept Zhen waiting.”

Shen Huaishi’s brows furrowed slightly. He had heard that the son of heaven’s soul-loss disease had taken a turn for the better. But a full recovery wasn’t something achievable in a day. The emperor in front of him was not at all like someone with a mental deficiency.

Shen Huaishi was filled with misgivings. He brushed aside the lower hem of his robes and knelt down. “Greetings to His Majesty.”

Jiang Xing said to Xiao Songzi, “You go and invite the National Teacher here.”

After Xiao Songzi left, Jiang Xing sized up Shen Huaishi and said, “Shen Gongzi doesn’t seem to be in a very good mood. Master Lin returned home to the General’s Mansion today to attend to General Gu’s funeral. Shen Gongzi

must have also gone to offer his condolences. I'm a little curious, what did you see?"

Shen Huaishi's eyes turned gloomy and he said in a hoarse voice, "This subordinate… saw nothing."

"Good." Jiang Xing got up and walked to the window. Looking at grayish light off in the horizon, he suddenly said, "Dawn? That's great."

Shen Huaishi instinctively froze. He looked up at His Majesty who was speaking and behaving strangely.

This was the last thing General Gu had said before his death and only he knew it. The emperor summoning him in the middle of the night and saying this sentence — was it a coincidence or did it have some deeper meaning?

Shen Huaishi quickly came up with an answer. This sentence though said infrequently was common enough. Besides, it was indeed dawn so there was nothing strange about the Emperor saying it.

Jiang Xing caught the hesitation on Shen Huaishi's face, and said with a smile, "Zhen asked you a question once, but you didn't answer. For some reason, I really want to know the answer today and so I called you to the palace."

Sweat broke out on Shen Huaishi's forehead. "This subordinate is slow-witted.

I ask that His Majesty speak clearly."

Jiang Xing said, "Have you used the fake death drug that my wife gave you that day?"

Cold sweat broke out all over Shen Huaishi's body. He choked out, "… Your Majesty?"

Jiang Xing put away his smile and presented a rare display of seriousness. "Huaishi, you've had a difficult journey."

Shen Huaishi was completely dumbfounded. He was originally the reticent sort but now he was so shocked that he simply lost all words. His reaction was just as Jiang Xing expected. Most people wouldn't believe in soul transfers and explaining would be troublesome. Just then, Xu Junyuan arrived and the task of explaining to Shen Huaishi fell to the National Teacher.

Xu Junyuan didn't expect that the son of heaven would call him here in the middle of the night just for this kind of thing. He didn't know whether to

laugh or cry. He had no choice but to narrate systematically and in complete detail about how Gu Fuzhou's soul returned to his body upon his death.

Hearing all this, Shen Huaishi was taken aback. He was completely struck dumb. This matter was simply too outrageous. But if he took it to be true, a lot of these strange things now made sense.

Like how the new emperor's soul-loss disease suddenly improved, why Lin Qingyu reacted so casually to Gu Fuzhou's death, how Lin Qingyu and the

emperor could stand in front of Gu Fuzhou's memorial tablet and…do something like that.

Can a soul change bodies? Was there really such a bizarre thing in the world?

"Of course, there is." Jiang Xing said, "If you don't believe me, you can ask me some questions that only Gu Fuzhou would know the answer to."

After being dealt with successive shocks, Shen Huaishi was a little dazed and it took a long time before he said, "Before the siege, General Wu caught two cut-sleeve soldiers…"

"Are you asking for the names of those two people? Jiang Shiyue and Lin Lan." Saying this, Jiang Xing felt a heaviness in his heart. He made a note of asking Lin Qingyu later about the issue of compensation for the deceased soldiers.

Shen Huaishi looked more and more dazed. Based on his expression, he probably beginning to doubt whether this world was even real.

Jiang Xing said again, "Huaishi, you are the one who accompanied General Gu to the very end. Only you know what he said before he died. Can you tell me what he said?"

Shen Huaishi spoke instinctively, "The General said he didn't want to die. He said…said that Doctor Lin was still waiting for him."

Jiang Xing shook his head. "You remembered wrong. Before his death, General

Gu said that he couldn't hold on any longer but he didn't want for Imperial Physician Lin to waste his life. He only hoped that Imperial Physician Lin could find someone to love again, to build a good relationship; someone he could grow old with. — This is General Gu's last wish. If Imperial Physician Lin were to truly grow old and die alone for him, he would not be able to die in peace." Jiang Xing sighed quietly, "Zhen has heard from the National Teacher that people who die with their eyes open cannot be reincarnated, they can only be reduced to wandering ghosts, unable even even to enjoy the fragrance of incense. Tsk, how truly wretched."

Xu Junyuan suddenly realized what he was after and said with a smile, "His Majesty is wise. I had wondered why the emperor chose not to tell the

Empress Dowager the truth but confessed instead to Shen Gongzi. So that is how it is."

Shen 'honest man' Huaishi still couldn't wrap his head around it. "But that's not what General Gu said."

Jiang Xing smiled lightly. "But he could have."

Half a month later, Gu Fuzhou's body was escorted to the capital by Shi Pei. Lin Qingyu and the people from the Ministry of Rites went out of the city to welcome them in person, receiving them with proper etiquette.

When he had set off on this expedition, he was at the head of a powerful army sent off with music of solemn fervor. It was a stirring sight. When he returned, he was nothing but a single shattered corpse, lying quietly.

Shi Pei led a group of trusted aides to escort Gu Fuzhou's bier and coffin from the Northwest all the way to the capital. When they saw the city gate, these hot-blooded men on the battlefield burst into tears, sighed and sobbed, "General, we've finally brought you home."

Gu Fuzhou had no father or mother and no one knows the location of his ancestral grave. In light of his meritorious service, the Empress Dowager

allowed him to be buried in the imperial tomb. He was the first subject to enjoy this honor since the founding of the country.

Shi Pei handed the Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear to Lin Qingyu and he asked in a hoarse voice, “Madam, would you like to take one last look at the General?”

Lin Qingyu stared at the coffin. He hesitated for a long time and then shook his head lightly. “I won’t be disturbing the General rest anymore. Let this Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear be buried with the General so as to let him quickly be at rest.”

There was no need to cling to the past. Obstinately sticking to the wrong course would only add to troubles. Jiang Xing hoped that he could move on and he also needed to move on.

He wanted to bid farewell to Gu Fuzhou formally like he’d done before for Lu Wancheng. From now on, the only person who would accompany him was Jiang Xing.

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When it was time for Gu Fuzhou to be buried, the coffin was transported on a giant ornate open carriage. It was escorted by Shi Pei, Wu Zhan and the others all the way to the imperial mausoleum, where it was buried by the entrance, implying that in his eternal rest he would be in the company of kings. Afterwards, Lin Qingyu personally sent the memorial tablet he had made for Gu Fuzhou two years ago to the Imperial Ancestral Temple to forever enjoy the incense of future generations.

On this day, all officials of fifth rank and above came to the palace to see Gu Fuzhou off on his final journey. After attending the ceremony at the Imperial Ancestral Temple, Shi Pei, Wu Guogong, Wu Zhan, and Shen Huaishi left the palace together. Gu Fuzhou had been closest to them during his lifetime and

now, reunited at Gu Fuzhou's funeral, their conversation naturally turned to the general's last wishes.

"The General wants Master Lin to remarry?" Wu Zhan was taken aback, "Shen Xiongdi, are you sure you heard it right?"

Shen Huaishi wasn't good at lying. In order to be able to deliver this lie well, he had practiced a lot in private. But when it really came time to deceive them, his expression was still a little stiff. "I – am sure."

Fortunately, Shi Pei believed him unquestioningly. "The General loved Master Lin deeply. I am not at all surprised that he would say such a thing."

Shen Huaishi nodded seriously. "That is true."

Wu Zhan couldn't understand: "If I die, I hope my wife would remain a widow for me for the rest of her life. Thinking of some other man holding her after I die and my son calling that man 'father', I think I would be so enraged, I might just come back to life."

Shi Pei sighed, "The General is not you. Master Lin is cold an aloof, unwilling to socialize with others. He doesn't even have a friend who he can drink with

at the same table. The General was afraid that after his passing, there would be no one to accompany Master Lin, that he would be lonely as he aged."

Shen Huaishi quickly chimed in, "The General also said that if Master Lin really does grow old alone, he wouldn't be able to close his eyes even in death."

Wu Guogong said, voice rough and shaky, "Well, this is easy enough to handle. My old lady loved playing matchmaker. I'll ask her to find out if there is any suitable matches in the capital for Master Lin — by the way, would you know if Master Lin is looking to take in a husband or a wife this time?"

Shi Pei smiled wryly, "It's too early for His Excellency to be discussing this. The General's body has yet to even grow cold and you are already trying to find a match for Master Lin. If this gets out, what will others think of Master Lin? At least, wait for Master Lin to finish his year of marital piety."

After news of Gu Fuzhou's death reached the capital, rumors about Lin Qingyu's inauspiciousness, about his bringing of misfortune upon his husbands once again raised a tremendous clamor. Lin Qingyu had been married off to Lu Wancheng as part of a Chong Xi and although Lu Wancheng lived an extra year, the Lu Family was almost ruined. Later, he remarried Gu Fuzhou and in just two years, the ever-victorious general was strangled by his inauspiciousness to the point of death.

Lin Qingyu had a cold demeanor but his appearance is bright and charming. Even if such a beauty did nothing, it was inevitable that he would attract countless rumors and gossips. Even more so that he had now outlived two

husbands but was of such great skill that he commanded power equal to that of a prime minister. Though they do be outrageous words, people had begun to whisper that he had brought disaster upon a family first, upon the army second and will upon the country third. They were afraid that the Dayu would perish at the hands of this "monster". It was just that due to Lin Qingyu's power, no one dared to discuss it openly.

Wu Guogon wanted only to let Gu Fuzhou rest in peace and momentarily forgot about this matter. He slapped his head and said, "Look this head of mine. I'm getting old."

Shen Huaishi considered and then probed, "This matter cannot be rushed. But His Excellency can use this year to find suitable candidates for Master Lin."

Wu Zhan still disagreed and he angrily, "Except for the General, I don't think anyone in this court is worthy of Master Lin."

As they were talking, a voice sounded behind them, "Generals."

Wu Zhan turned around. "Oh, Master Li."

Li Chan bowed to them one by one and said, "I did not mean to eavesdrop but I overheard Shen Gongzi say that General Gu wanted Master Lin to remarry?"

"That's right." Wu Zhan scratched his head, "I don't know what he was

thinking. Sigh."

There was a second of temptation in Li Chan's heart and a vague vain hope begun to take shape. In the next second, he spurned his own despicableness

and shamelessness. “What General Wu said is absolutely true. Except for General Gu, no one is worthy of Master Lin.”

Shen Huaishi said hesitantly, “Actually…”

“Your Excellencies, Wu Guogong, General Shi, General Wu, Shen Gongzi, please wait.” Xiao Songzi was trotting over to them. He caught up to them and said, “Master Lin is requesting your presence in Dali Temple.”

Shi Pei asked, “Dali Temple? Why is Master Lin asking us to go there?”

Shen Huaishi shook his head, expressing that he didn’t know either.

Wu Zhan said, “Oh, I know. It must be because of that.”

Li Chan couldn’t help asking, “Do I not need to go?”

Xiao Songzi smiled and said, “There is no need. Master Lin only called for these four.”

When the four arrived at Dali Temple, Lin Qingyu was already waiting for them there.

“As I have said before, I shall give an explanation to the soldiers of the Northwest regarding the robbery of the provisions from Jiangnan.” Lin

Qingyu said, “Now that we have laid General Gu to rest, I think it is time that we settle this matter.”

They all turned to look at each other. Shi Pei said, “Master Lin, do you mean to say that there was more to the matter of Xixia’s robbery of our provisions that day?”

Wu Zhan said, “At the time, we were afraid of affecting your morale, so we didn’t tell you. It’s like this…”

The four of them followed Lin Qingyu to a water prison. Water boarding was one of the torture methods used in the Dayu. There is a reservoir on the upper floor of the water prison. Once it was operated, the prisoners would be submerged and driven to the very edge of drowning. When their limit is reached, they would yank them back so as to keep them barely alive. Done over and over, it was a life worse than death.

Xi Rong’s lower body was submerged in the water. His whole body was drenched. His long hair stuck to his pale and swollen face. Hearing the sound of footsteps, he opened his eyes a slit and looked at his visitor with difficulty. For a moment, he thought he was hallucinating. “Lin Qingyu…?”

Shi Pei was considered a scholar-general, with a warm and gentle temperament. But at this time his eyes were like blade, wishing to shred Xi Rong into pieces. “It was you, a eunuch… you’re the one who caused us to have

no food so that we were forced to launch the attack. Because of you General Gu was…"

Lin Qingyu said, "General Shi."

But Lin Qingyu stopped him too late, Xi Rong had already guessed and asked with great interest, "So, is Gu Fuzhou dead or disabled?"

Wu Zhan roared angrily, "You son of a bitch, how dare you speak General Gu's name!"

Xi Rong smiled and a trace of his past androgynous beauty could still be vaguely seen on his face. "I do dare. How does Master Lin want to punish me for it? Apart from castration and waterboarding, what else have I not suffered?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I heard from the Minister of Dali Temple that you still refuse to admit your guilt."

"The winner is the king and the loser is the bandit. I have nothing to say." Xi Rong said calmly, "Only, I never felt that I did anything wrong."

Wu Guogong was so furious that his beard bristled. "You still won't admit to your crime even when death is at hand!"

"Lin Qingyu looked down upon the emperor, relying on the military power in the hands of his husband to hide the truth from the court and the people. He

stirred up trouble and cast the emperor aside. What is wrong with me eradicating traitors for the emperor?"

Shi Pei said, voice shaking, "Because you colluded with the Xixia, tens of thousands of soldiers died in Yongliang! You still think you did nothing wrong?"

It was like Xi Rong heard some great joke. "You seem perfectly fine with Lin Qingyu seeking power. I but did the same thing as him, so why am I wrong? If I had done something wrong, it's that I miscalculated. One careless move and the whole game was lost."

Wu Zhan scathingly rebutted, "Retribution is paid out in kind. You son of a bitch, this is you retribution!"

"Retribution? Heh." Xi Rong looked at Lin Qingyu, his lips curled into a sneer. "If there really is such a thing as retribution in this world there why is Master Lin standing here safe and sound? The blood on Master Lin's hands may not be any less than those on mine."

Shen Huaishi frowned. "Utter garbage."

"Whether it is nonsense or not Master Lin knows better than anyone else." Xi Rong showed a cruel smile, "Liang Shi of the Nan'an Hou's Mansion going mad, Lu Qiaosong dying tragically, Lu Niantao banished to the cold palace, Concubine Chen and the former crown prince Xiao Cheng…who of them hadn't fallen into your hands? Even these people standing beside you, just how

sincere as you to them? The only reason you don't look down on them is because they're useful, am I not right? "

Lin Qingyu looked at him, his face devoid of any expression.

"Lin Qingyu, you are cold, indifferent. You are selfish, you look only after yourself. Love desires life, evil desires death. Do you think you are any better than me? We are birds of the same feather, you and I. If I am to suffer retribution, you can be sure you'll get yours too. Look, Gu Fuzhou is now

dead. The retribution you deserve is all dumped onto the people you love. Lu Wancheng, Gu Fuzhou… who will it be next?"

Shen Huaishi looked at Lin Qingyu. He saw that the other party's eyes were calm as if he took no notice at all of Xi Rong's words.

Wu Zhan spat, "Death is too good for him. He should live in this water prison for the rest of his life. Unable to live, unable to die!"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "I will entrust this person's case to you gentlemen. There are other palace matters I must see to so I must now take my leave."

Shen Huaishi said, "Master Lin?"

Lin Qingyu strode away from the dungeon as if he heard nothing, leaving the group looking at each other in blank dismay.

Xi Rong closed his eyes slowly and said with a quiet chuckle, "This is what you're most afraid of. You too have a weakness. It's a pity…"

It's a pity that Lin Qingyu's weakness was also the toughest thing in the world. Lin Qingyu's weakness was one that would protect him and become his armor. While other people's weakness was nothing more than a burden that dragged them back.

Lin Qingyu returned to the palace, had the evening meal with Jiang Xing and then reviewed the reports as usual. He seemed to be his same usual self. Jiang

Xing could vaguely sense that his mood was not quite right. He asked him what was the matter but Lin Qingyu said it was nothing. He told Jiang Xing to go to bed early and to not to distract him from his work.

In the middle of the night, Jiang Xing woke up, wanting to get a drink of water. He was surprised to see a great beauty sitting by his bedside. He asked, dazed, “Qingyu?”

“It’s me.” Lin Qingyu lifted up the quilt and took the initiative to get in his bed, slipping into Jiang Xing’s arms.

Jiang Xing was overwhelmed by this unexpected favor but he still didn’t forget to tease him. “Is the pretty little widow unable to sleep so he came to climb into Zhen’s bed?”

Lin Qingyu didn’t laugh. Instead, he said softly, “Jiang Xing.”

“Sigh, I knew there was something the matter but you still wouldn’t admit it.” Jiang Xing pulled the quilt up to cover Lin Qingyu’s shoulders. Fighting back his sleepiness, he said, “Tell me, Baobei, who provoked you?”

Lin Qingyu kept his eyes open. He asked, “Do you believe that retribution is paid out in kind?”

Jiang Xing simply said, “No and you shouldn’t believe it either.”

“But, what if it really is? And because I’ve done all kinds of evil things … I

made you suffer from the agony of poison and the pain of being pierced by thousands of arrows?" Lin Qingyu said helplessly, his eyes revealing how completely lost he felt, "Although I despise the world, I love you —— Could it be that I can't?"

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I was dark and he couldn't see but Jiang Xing could imagine what kind of expression Lin Qingyu had on right now. He got up and lit the lamp. The light penetrated the gauze curtain, illuminating the dragon bed a warm pale yellow.

Jiang Xing sat down on the bed with his legs apart He pulled Lin Qingyu out of the quilt and carefully scrutinized the other's expression. Just as he imagined, he was looking helpless and at a loss. He put Lin Qingyu on his lap and wrapped his arms around him from behind. He said, "Of course, you can. You

can love me as much as you want and how much that is is exactly as much as I want."

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and said, "If the way Heaven deals retribution onto me is to by making the one I love suffer…"

"If that were the case, why does Heaven keep giving me a chance to come back from the dead? Wouldn't it be better to simply make me stay dead?"

What Jiang Xing said made some sense but Lin Qingyu was still worried. He said, plagued by lingering fear, "Maybe if I'm any worse, they really will take you away."

"They? Who's 'they'?"

"I don't know." Lin Qingyu murmured, "They can't get to me so they bully you. Because they know that this is the best way to torture me."

"You have to think about it from another angle. 'They' just can't bear to see you suffer, so they keep sending me back again and again. Last time I was sent to the Northwest and you were miserable for half a year. This time, they let me return to the city immediately after I died and I was able to find you as soon as

I woke up." It was as though Jiang Xing had woken up from a dream, "My God, Qingyu, you are a beauty of fortune favored by Heaven!"

Lin Qingyu asked again, "Why would they favor me?"

Jiang Xing pretended to think, "Maybe it's because you found the antidote to the epidemic a few years ago?"

Lin Qingyu shook his head. "I can't claim credit for that by myself."

"You've done enough." Jiang Xing told him, "Better than most people."

Lin Qingyu smiled, as if he had been coaxed into feeling a little better.

Jiang Xing breathed a sigh of relief. As soon as he relaxed, he started to feel sleepy again. "Besides, the National Teacher said that Xiao Li's body is my original body in the Dayu. The first two don't fit me and the soul wasn't a match for the body. Naturally, it couldn't have lasted long. I just had to die

twice more to get back to my actual body. What does this have to do with you?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a long time but still decided in the end, "Regardless, I will do less bad things in the future."

"Don't, Baobei. Do what you want to do. If you change yourself for our relationship then that'll make me a scumbag."

Jiang Xing knew Lin Qingyu too well and Lin Qingyu's malice would never arise for no reason. He didn't need Lin Qingyu to suppress his instincts. Rather, he needed all these other idiots to mind their own business and stop messing with his wife.

Lin Qingyu looked back at him and asked, "Then if other people still come to provoke you and I in the future, can I still do bad things to them?"

"Of course, you can. You can do whatever bad things you want to them." Jiang Xing put his chin on Lin Qingyu's shoulder, narrowed his eyes and said, "Even as a sickly invalid like Lu Wancheng I was able to take care of the aftermath for you. Now that I am sitting upon the imperial throne, why shouldn't you be

allowed to play around as you please? Baobei, do not worry, I'll take care of it if something goes wrong."

Lin Qingyu laughed. "I am a powerful minister and you are a puppet monarch. What are you talking about 'taking care' of things for me?"

Jiang Xing did his best to hold back his sleepiness and patiently explained, "If even an idiot like Xiao Jie could get Cui Lian and the Tianji Camp to be loyal to him just by sitting on the dragon throne, just imagine what I can do. There are so many things that I can do now by virtue of this position."

Jiang Xing always knew how to make him feel at ease. Lin Qingyu's heart settled down and he said, "It's getting late. I'll go back to the side hall to sleep."

Jiang Xing was so sleepy that he hugged Lin Qingyu and threw them back together onto the bed. "You're here already so why go?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated. "If tomorrow the eunuch who comes in to serve you in the morning sees…"

"It's alright, the only one who waits on me in the mornings is Xiao Songzi."

Lin Qingyu also didn't want to be separated from Jiang Xing. So he found a comfortable position in his arms, curled up in a ball and fell asleep.

The next day, Xiao Songzi came in to serve His Majesty as usual. He was surprised to find that the Emperor was already up. What shocked him even

more was that there was a figure behind the bed's curtain canopy.

"Your Ma-…"

Jiang Xing raised his finger to his lips. "Shhhh."

Xiao Songzi covered his mouth. He stared and shook his head as if to say that he didn't see anything. When the two proceeded to the outer hall, Jiang Xing asked, "Where did Master Lin go after presiding over General Gu's funeral yesterday?"

Xiao Songzi said, "Master Lin took Wu Guogong, General Shi, General Wu as well as Shen Gongzi to Dali Temple."

Taking the generals and Shen Huaishi to Dali Temple must have been to discuss the matter regarding the robbery of the provisions from Jiangnan. So, that was the reason why he had to put in so much effort to get Lin Qingyu

back to normal? A few words from Xi Rong had agitated Lin Qingyu so much that he couldn't sleep and so he threw himself into his arms for comfort?

Hmph, that needs to be taken care of.

Jiang Xing put on his dragon robe and said, "Go and call Shen Huaishi."

Shen Huaishi has not yet arrived when Xu Junyuan came asking to see him. He came to ask Jiang Xing for his leave.

"Now that the Emperor has trustworthy people around him, His Majesty has no need for this minister. The clamors in the palace is not conducive to my spiritual cultivation. I would like to return to Changsheng Temple and devote myself to praying for the Dayu and the emperor."

Jiang Xing said, "You came just in time. Zhen has something to ask you. According to what you said, I am now using my own original body. My soul shouldn't go running around anymore, correct?"

Xu Junyuan nodded and said, "Replying to the Emperor, yes, it's shouldn't."

Jiang Xing had said the same to Lin Qingyu but Lin Qingyu still got worked up over nothing. Psychological problems sometimes needed external support.

Maybe a physical reassurance could be effective in giving Lin Qingyu some peace of mind."

"Do you have maybe a 'Soul-settling Jade' or something like that?"

"Soul-settling Jade'? Xu Junyuan wondered, "What is that?"

In other words, there wasn't any such thing. Jiang Xing looked Xu Junyuan up and down, his gaze zeroing in on the jade pendant around his waist. "That."

At this moment, Xiao Songzi brought in Shen Huaishi. "Your Majesty, Shen Gongzi is here."

Shen Huaishi has known the true identity of the emperor for some time. After digesting this information for so long, he could now, with much difficulty, reconcile the Gu Fuzhou he knew with this young emperor in front of him. This was also due to the fact that Jiang Xing's personality was simply too

distinct, especially during time when he made no effect to hide it. You would not be able to find another in this world that gave off the same feeling.

Shen Huaishi was about to kneel down to salute when he heard the emperor say, “You don’t need to be polite in front of me. I heard that Master Lin took you to Dali Temple yesterday.”

Shen Huaishi nodded. “Yes.”

“Did he say how Xi Rong was going to be dealt with?”

“Master Lin left the matter to us. General Wu means to let him experience Dayu’s torture.”

Jiang Xing disagreed, “Xi Rong can endure even waterboarding. How can everything else compare to that? When dealing with a person like him, attacking the heart is the best strategy.”

Shen Huaishi asked, “What does His Majesty have in mind?”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Nothing brilliant but you might wish to consider it. For example, you could take Xi Rong to Jinyang Garden and —” Jiang Xing

paused, “have him commit suicide.”

Xu Junyuan was curious, “Why Jinyang Garden?”

Jiang Xing said casually, “The scenery there is beautiful.”

When Xu Junyuan understood, he couldn’t help being quite surprised. This was not like Jiang Gongzi’s style. This was more like something Lin Qingyu would do.

Come to think of it, Jiang Gongzi was gradually adapting to his new identity.

The so-called Imperial throne encompassed all under heaven. The emperor held power over everyone, all were within his mind.

Hearing movement in the hall, Jiang Xing waved the two of them back.

Lin Qingyu was tying up his hair when he saw Jiang Xing come in. He asked, “I missed morning court. Why didn’t you wake me up?”

Jiang Xing said, “I just woke up too. I have something to show you.”

“What is it?”

Jiang Xing opened his hand and a jade pendant tied with a palace sash hung

from his finger. “This is the legendary Soul-settling Jade.”

Lin Qingyu was suspicious, “‘Soul-settling Jade’?”

“With this, my soul will be firmly attached to this body and it won’t go flying around the Dayu ever again.” Jiang Xing was making it up, “I heard from Xu Junyuan that this was made from a piece of jade found at the very top of Kunlun Mountain. A piece of spirit stone, nourished by the aura of heaven and earth has become a spiritual…”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

He had just mentioned this matter last night and Xu Junyuan already took the initiative to send this over? How could there be such a coincidence? But Jiang Xing was trying so hard to appease him that he didn’t want to disappoint Jiang Xing.

Lin Qingyu chuckled softly, “I see. I feel very relieved.”

A few days later, news came from Jinyang Garden. Xi Rong refused to comply with the order. He refused to hang himself in the garden. After dragging on for an hour, his throat was sliced by Shi Pei’s sword. Blood flowed from his mouth

and neck, soaking the ground, even the peach blossoms in the garden seemed a little more delicate and charming.

It was said that before he died, he had only one request, “A’Jie, don’t look.”

The day after Xi Rong’s death, Xiao Jie too went mad. It might not be quite accurate to use the word ‘mad’. He made no fuss nor did he have any violent outburst. However, his eyes lost their luster. He uttered not a word, leaving himself to the mercy of others. Just like how Xiao Li was before, it seemed as though nothing but a delicate shell remained.

After Lin Qingyu learned of this, he asked Xiao Songzi to send a bottle of medicine to Xiao Jie. Jiang Xing asked him, “Is Master Lin going to do something bad, or is he going to do something good?”

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. “Your Majesty is free to venture a guess.”

In March, the grass grew and the warblers flew. The spring blossoms flourished. This long winter was finally over.

Under the tireless teaching of the Empress Dowager, although His Majesty still didn’t talk much, his words have become more and more fluent.

Ordinary princes, once they learned to speak, moved on to learning hw to recognize characters, followed by the Four Books and the Five Classics, then historical studies and policy discussions. The Empress Dowager devoted herself to the cultivation of His Majesty and seldom intervened in government

affairs. Lin Qingyu was left alone with his trusted aides to drag this slacker emperor's country forward. Finally, he pushed onto the position of prime minister.

Lin Qingyu has never passed the government examination. A mere imperial physician was unexpectedly able to become the head of a hundred offices at this day and age. Some people say that he got to where he was now by treading on two dead husbands. Some people say, his methods were superb and wondered what sort of potion he had fed the previous emperor and the empress dowager. And still others disagreed, persisting in their belief that Lin Qingyu had relied on his face.

However, no matter how unpleasant the things people said in private, they still had to respectfully address him as 'Prime Minister Lin'.

On this day, Lin Qingyu happened to pass by the Imperial Hospital and he saw many new faces. These people were all medical officers who had just entered

the palace and some of them seemed to be about the same age as he was when he entered the palace.

A medical officer was walking along, frowning and lost in thought. Who knows what he was thinking, when his acupuncture bag fell to the ground, he did not even notice. Lin Qingyu bent down and picked it up. He said, “Stop.”

The medical officer turned his head when he heard this. He was met with the sight of a crane embroidered on an indigo uniform of office. Above that was a beautiful and fierce face.

The medical officer was stunned and only returned to his senses when he heard the eunuch cough. He hurriedly knelt down and said, “Gre-greetings to the Prime Minister.”

In this palace, there was only one person who could have such a beautiful face wearing a crane-embroidered official uniform.

Lin Qingyu looked at the acupuncture bag for a while and then returned it. The medical officer was overwhelmed by this favor from a superior and took it with trembling handds. Blushing, he said, “Thank you, Prime Minister.”

Lin Qingyu was momentarily dazed. He said, “You best be on your way.”

Sure enough, compared to handling government affairs, he still preferred the art of healing and cultivating Gu. Unfortunately, since Xiao Jie ascended the

throne, he has not had time to do the things he likes.

When Lin Qingyu returned to Xingqing Palace, he felt inexplicably tired when he saw the mountain of scrolls on the table. He forced himself to open one of them, a report from Wu Youyuan from the Northwest. According to the report, the Northwest Army had successfully captured a large city in Xixia. This was the first city in the southeast of Xixia, with a population of tens of thousands. They didn't want to hurt the surrendered soldiers and civilians, but Xixia's surrendered soldiers secretly colluded with the civilians, causing no end of trouble for the Northwest Garrison.

Wu Youyuan was proficient in the art of war and quickly matured into his role as a general after Gu Fuzhou's death. However, he didn't know the first thing

about governing a country. He could easily capture a city, but he didn't know how to govern one.

Lin Qingyu picked up his brush and was about to evaluate the matter, when a voice came from outside, "The Emperor returns to the palace—"

Jiang Xing waved away the others and complained, "I finally got free from Ci'an Palace — what are you doing?"

Lin Qingyu's tone was cool, "What else?"

Jiang Xing keenly noticed the grievance in Lin Qingyu's tone. He walked behind Lin Qingyu and said, eagerly-attentive, "Your Excellency, you have worked hard. Shall I give you a shoulder massage?"

Lin Qingyu didn't stop Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing massaged his shoulders just right, relieving a little bit of his fatigue. After a while, he said, "My legs are also sore."

Jiang Xing pushed away the scrolls, freeing up a small space on the table. He carried Lin Qingyu onto it so that he could wait on him.

Under Jiang Xing's careful ministration, the beautiful prime minister was touched everywhere. Even Lin Qingyu's official uniform was massaged into disarray. Jiang Xing, who was still a hot-blooded young man, inevitably started

to feel a little frisky. He asked politely, “Qingyu, can you spare some time for me to take advantage of you?”

Lin Qingyu hadn’t been in any mood to handle official matters in the first place. And so, he stretched out his hand and asked, “And how do you plan to take advantage?”

Jiang Xing’s breathing tightened and he said with a smile, “Lord Prime Minister, you’re getting Zhen painfully hard.”

Lin Qingyu said regrettably, “However, this minister still has a mountain of report to get through.”

“It’s fine, I’ll help you look through them later.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t believe it. “You know how to?”

Jiang Xing said absent-mindedly, “I can give it a try.”

Ever since Lin Qingyu begun attending court and overseeing government affairs, he held a brush every day. A thin layer of calluses had formed on the

pads of his fingertips. Jiang Xing couldn't bear it anymore and asked, "Qingyu, the ointment you gave me last time…"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes. "Do I look like someone who carries that sort of thing on me? You didn't want it when it when I gave it to you last time and now it's gone. You're too late."

Jiang Xing just smiled. "You don't need to carry it. In the future, I'll carry it with me. If it's gone, it's fine. Forget it, let's play something else this time." Saying that, he bowed his head again, closing in on him.

Lin Qingyu's eyes widened and his voice trembled, "You…"

He didn't know where to put his hands and accidentally knocked against the scroll beside him. The piled up scrolls suddenly toppled over and scattered all over the ground.

Jiang Xing found the table too inconvenient, so he carried Lin Qingyu to the bed. It was warm within the lotus canopy and sweet fragrance suffused the air.

By the time Lin Qingyu got down from the dragon bed, it was already late. Afterwards, Jiang Xing pestered him into taking a nap and thus passed the entire day. Thinking of the piles of things waiting for him to deal with, Lin Qingyu felt a little regretful. He shouldn't have put off handling business to do

improper things with this ‘incapable ruler’ in broad daylight. He was afraid he was going to have to work through the night once again.

Lin Qingyu returned to the desk, only to see that the scrolls that had fallen had been picked up at some point and placed neatly on the desk.

Whenever he was in the same palace as Jiang Xing, the servants dared not enter without permission — So, did Jiang Xing take care of it?

Lin Qingyu opened Wu Youyuan’s report. Inside were three words written in his handwriting: divide and conquer.

He turned to a certain someone completely passed out on the bed. He turned thoughtful.

Jiang Xing has been salted fish for too long. It was time to drag him to handle serious matters.

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Chapter 112

The empress dowager was still teaching Jiang Xing the most basic reading and writing when Lin Qingyu already had a “grand” plan.

On this day, while Jiang Xing was taking his afternoon nap, Lin Qingyu went to Ci’an Palace to visit the empress dowager. The empress dowager was admiring a poem copied by Jiang Xing, when she saw him coming inm she said with a smile, “Qingyu, come quickly and have a look. The emperor’s handwriting is so good, so full of vigor.”

Lin Qingyu glanced at it. Jiang Xing had obviously deliberately written it in a rounded, childish way. Only the empress dowager would find any sort of vigor

in it. “Your Highness, since the emperor can now read and write, it is time to invite an imperial instructor to teach the emperor.”

The queen mother hesitated and said, “The emperor is still young. Letting him stay by Aijia’s side and learn from Aijia isn’t a bad thing, no?”

“I’m afraid there are some things that you cannot teach him.”

The empress dowager couldn’t hide her distress. “But the emperor…he is still a child.”

Lin Qingyu reminded her, “The emperor will be eighteen at the end of the year.” They didn’t know if it was a coincidence, but Xiao Li and Jiang Xing’s birthdays were on the same day.

“You can’t say that.” The empress dowager said reproachfully, “Although the emperor is almost eighteen, mentally he is like a child of seven or eight years old.”

“Our imperial princes start schooling at five. The emperor is already ‘seven or eight’ years old. If you continue to pamper him, do you mean to let others secure the country for him for the rest of his life?

Lin Qingyu’s words were a bit harsh and the empress dowager had taken on a somewhat ugly expression. But, this argument was reasonable. If the emperor wanted to secure his position on the throne, the sooner he took charge, the

better. After deliberating, the empress dowager said, “Do you have a candidate for the emperor’s teacher?”

Lin Qingyu quickly found a suitable candidate. Guan Zhongkai, who wrote poems at the age of three, recited rhapsodies at the age of five, successfully passed the provincial level examination at a tender age and then went on to place first in the imperial examinations. During the reign of the previous emperor, he was in charge of the privy council and he held key positions in the Ministry of Appointments and the Ministry of Revenue. He retired due to old age and returned to his hometown five years ago. He was now an elder of sixty-five.

This person was Li Chan’s mentor and was recommended by Li Chan to Lin Qingyu. Prime Minister Lin personally wrote a letter, sincere and humble, inviting Senior Guan back to the capital to take up the post of imperial instructor.

One day, Jiang Xing had been at the Empress Dowager’s palace, able to pass by simply casually writing a few words; the next, he had a whole new erudite and informed imperial instructor.

Lin Qingyu said, “From now on, His Majesty shall no longer go to Ci’an Palace for his studies. The emperor shall study as the Dayu’s princes do.”

Guan Taifu had a head of crane white hair and a bearing like that of a pine tree. He looked like an immortal wise man stepped out of a fairy tale. He also

treated everyone courteously. “This minister, Guan Zhongkai, greets His Majesty.”

Jiang Xing had a bad premonition but nevertheless, he still equally courteous, returned the salute. After all, no matter what era he was in, respect for one’s teachers seemed to be something deeply ingrained in his bones. Then, he

turned to Lin Qingyu and said in the childish tone of a seven-year-old, “Prime Minister Gege, please come here.”

Lin Qingyu was pulled aside by Jiang Xing. “What?”

Jiang Xing asked in a low voice, “How exactly do the Dayu’s princes study?”

“Every day at Yinshi, they prepare for the classes ahead. Classes officially start at Maoshi and lasts until noon.”

Hearing the word “Yinshi”, Jiang Xing almost couldn’t breathe. “No… Qingyu, I’m still growing. If I don’t enough sleep, I might not grow taller.”

Lin Qingyu looked up at him. “In the afternoon, princes usually take riding and archery lessons. But you’ve done enough archery and horse-riding in your previous life, so you can skip it this time.”

“Then can I have the afternoons off?”

Lin Qingyu said cruelly, “You will continue your studies in the afternoon.”

Jiang Xing laughed in anger. “You want me to go back to the third year?”

Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu had once talked about his studies in his hometown and so, Lin Qingyu knew a thing or two about it, “His Majesty is overthinking

matters. When you were in your third year of high school, how many days off did you get every month?"

Jiang Xing looked defensive. "Eight days."

Lin Qingyu smiled and said, "Princes only get two days off every year. One day on the first day of the Lunar New Year and the other on the prince's birthday."

Jiang Xing choked. "Even the cows in the fields don't plow as much. I'm already the emperor, why do I have to suffer like this?"

"Because you're the emperor, you have to learn more than others."

"But I just want to be a good-for-nothing emperor."

"Then what about your country?" Lin Qingyu was cold and contemptuous, "You want to rely on me for the rest of your life? How's the soft rice, is it good?"

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "It's quite delicious."

Lin Qingyu threw him a sharp look, eyes like blades and Jiang Xing quickly changed his words again, "Qingyu, have you ever heard the saying of

‘governing by noninterference, to follow the natural course of things’? I think…”

Lin Qingyu said, “You study during the day but you still have time to play at night.”

“Then will you play with me?”

“I could. If I’m not busy.”

Jiang Xing sighed and compromised, “Alright.”

Whether Jiang Xing was willing or not, his days of strenuous study had fallen onto his physically seventeen year old body and his mentally twenty-one year old mind. Though he’d learned some basics when he was in his hometown, it was limited to occasionally memorizing a couple lines of poem to flirt with his wife. When it came to recognizing and choosing the proper words, he was far from the level of Dayu’s prominent home-grown scholars. Guan Zhongkai was undoubtedly a good teacher, but he lectured in a monotonous tone of voice, making Jiang Xing very drowsy.

Lin Qingyu hadn’t arranged for any study companions for Jiang Xing. He was the only student in his classes. He tried his very hardest not to fall asleep and sometimes, this truly was a superhuman feat.

Fortunately, he was the emperor; not a prince. He had no imperial father asking after his studies and the empress dowager was capable only of excessive

doting. Though his wife asked after his studies from time to time, he had his ways to distract Lin Qingyu.

After studying like this for three months, Lin Qingyu proposed taking Jiang Xing to attend court with him. Jiang Xing was not at all interested. He said, a completely disinterested expression on his face, “It doesn’t matter whether I go or not. Anyway, you’re there.”

Lin Qingyu had already seen through Jiang Xing. This person has always been like this when it came to things he had no interest in. But so long as he knew it was his responsibility, no matter how lazy he was, he would eventually reluctantly do it and do it well. This was true of marching and fighting and so, it would also be true of governing the country.

If Jiang Xing could perform so well on tasks he had no interest in, one could only imagine the results he could achieve in matters he did have an interest in.

It was a pity that Jiang Xing didn't seem interested in anything other than sleeping in bed or bedding him.

Lin Qingyu said, "Just go and listen in. It wouldn't harm and might even be beneficial."

"Alright, I'll listen to the Madam during the day."

Lin Qingyu felt something wasn't right. He asked, "What about at night?"

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Of course, I'll also listen to the Madam at night."

Lin Qingyu: "…" He's already started talking nonsense again.

Jiang Xing was woken up early in the morning and everyone involved in his morning routine was thrown into a frenzy. After dressing up, he was helped into the emperor's sedan chair and delivered to the throne room where morning court was held.

He sat at the highest point of the Golden Luan Hall, looking at the officials bored-ly through the bead curtain of his crown. After Emperor Chuxi abdicated, there were many changes among the officials in court. Lin Qingyu and the empress dowager suppressed a number of old officials and promoted many newcomers, including many, who like Li Chan, were not only young and talented but handsome as well . But Lin Qingyu was still the most outstanding.

He was the most eye-catching; one might even go so far as to say that he was a crane among a flock of chickens.

Lin Qingyu was calm, cold and detached in court. He was reticent, saying no more than necessary and he exuded an imposing aura. He was a completely different person from the one in Jiang Xing's arms. While admiring his wife's beauty, Jiang Xing listened to the discussions of the ministers and surprisingly didn't feel the least bit sleepy.

When court was over, the young emperor who hadn't said anything throughout suddenly said, "Prime Minister, are you not tired from standing?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Replying to the emperor, this minister is not tired."

"But looking at you makes Zhen feel tired." Jiang Xing seemed innocent and artless, ignorant of worldly affairs. "From now on, the prime minister will sit down while conducting court."

The hall feel instantly silent. Lin Qingyu looked up at Jiang Xing, knelt down and saluted, "I thank His Majesty for his kindness."

After this day, there appeared an extra wooden armchair in the Golden Luan Hall. Everyone knew that until the emperor takes over the reins of

government, this wooden armchair that Prime Minister Lin Xiang sits upon is the actual dragon throne.

After court, Lin Qingyu finally had some free time. And so, he invited Guan Zhongkai to ask about Jiang Xing's studies. "Guan Taifu, how goes His Majesty's studies?"

Guan Zhongkai appeared embarrassed. "This…"

Lin Qingyu said, "I ask Guan Taifu to speak freely."

Guan Zhongkai shook his head: "To tell you the truth, the emperor doesn't pay much attention to his schoolwork. If wholeheartedly is a hundred percent, he at most spends fifty. However, his writings are not bad. He answers every question and I can find no fault in them… This old man truly does not know how to admonish His Majesty."

The corners of Lin Qingyu's lips ticked up. "The emperor has always been like this."

"I think His Majesty is very talented. If he could but focus on his studies, he would certainly not be any less than the former crown prince."

Lin Qingyu pondered. "I see."

With the coming of summer, Lin Qingyu's workload grew heavier. Save for in morning court, Jiang Xing could catch neither hide nor hair of him the rest of

the day. He didn't panic at first, thinking that in any case, Lin Qingyu would go to Xingqing Palace to sleep at night. Who could have thought that he waited until the point of falling asleep and Lin Qingyu had yet to make an appearance. After asking Xiao Songzi, he learned that Lin Qingyu was still in Qinzheng Hall and seemed to still seemed to be dealing with work.

Jiang Xing, who could not sleep alone, changed his clothes and headed to Qinzheng Hall, where he saw Lin Qingyu working through the night alone. There seemed to be an endless amount of reports to answer, an endless list of

official documents to fill out. His silhouette of hard work and toil fell by the window. Seeing him, Jiang Xing's body and mind both felt tired and distressed.

——When did his wife become a corporate drone?

Jiang Xing walked in and said, "Qingyu, are you still busy?"

Lin Qingyu didn't even lift his head and simply uttered a cold 'en'.

Jiang Xing pulled out the chair beside him and sat down. "I'll keep you company."

"No need. You can go and play."

Jiang Xing frowned, "I won't. — We haven't seen each other for more than twenty hours. Don't you miss me?"

Of course he missed him. How could he not?

Jiang Xing didn't know how hard he had to work to stop himself from looking for him.

"Alright." Lin Qingyu said, "You can stay if you want, but don't disturb me."

Jiang Xing saw the exhaustion between Lin Qingyu's brows and in his eyes, He asked, "Qingyu, how much more do you have to read through? Can I help

you?"

A smile flashed in Lin Qingyu's eyes. "No, you won't understand."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Please forgive me for being immodest. But I think I can manage. I can understand some of it."

"Your current focus should be on your studies. Wait until Guan Taifu says you're ready. It won't be too late for you to share my worries and difficulties for me then."

Jiang Xing had a sudden realization and said, long and drawn out, "Prime Minister Lin seemed to have changed tactics in his quest to motivate me to study."

Lin Qingyu's expression remained indifferent. "Then is His Majesty willing to study hard?"

Jiang Xing sighed. "I'm really not interested. But for you… alright. Xiao Songzi, bring me that "Ce Lun" that I haven't finished reading today."

It had been a scorching summer day. It was now followed by heavy rain accompanied by the sound of muffled thunder.

Outside the window came the sound of pattering rain. Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu sat together, sharing a single lantern. One read a book while the other

managed government affairs. Their arms brushed from time to time.

Jiang Xing grew tired of reading. As soon as he raised his eyes, he caught sight of the person he liked.

Momentarily entranced, he felt an inexplicable throbbing. It was like he really had returned to his seventeen years self.

He couldn't help calling, "Qingyu."

Huh? As soon as Lin Qingyu raised his head, a kiss landed on his lips.

The two of them have shared countless heated kissed but Jiang Xing would always caught him off guard with it, making him blush and his heart beat faster. Lin Qingyu has no idea how he does it.

Was it because of his face?

Lin Qingyu's mind was giving way to foolish fancies but his tone remained calm. "Kissing and kissing, don't you get tired of it?"

After giving it serious thought, Jiang Xing replied, "It does get boring."

Lin Qingyu's eyes turned sharp as knives. "Say that again?"

"I think I'm getting tired of dating, how about… we get married a little earlier?" Jiang Xing said with a smile, "I'm going to be twenty-two soon. I'm

old enough to get a marriage certificate in my hometown."

Lin Qingyu was taken aback. Jiang Xing has returned to Xiao Li's body for some time now but he'd never thought about it.

Unlike the previous two times, Jiang Xing was now the emperor. Even if the number of male wives in the Dayu was increasing day by day, the emperor was not in any position to take on a male wife. His wife would be empress, a model for all women. Even if his wife could be a man, it certainly couldn't be one who'd been twice widowed.

Lin Qingyu was already very satisfied with the status quo. So long as he could be with Jiang Xing, his status mattered not to him. Of course, he wouldn't let Jiang Xing take on someone else as his empress. If the worst comes to worst, he would stick a few needles into Jiang Xing.

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly and shook his head. "You're the emperor and I'm your minister. How are we to get married?"

Jiang Xing smiled. He lowered his head and continued reading, "Let me think. There'll always be a way."

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Chapter 113

Jiang Xing's birthday was in September. This was his first Longevity Day since ascending the throne. The empress dowager, in particular, attached great importance to this and had plans of making a grand celebration. Jiang Xing had already gone through one coming-of-age. At the time, he secretly counted down the days in his heart and upon his eighteenth birthday, he shared his little secret with Lin Qingyu. Strictly speaking, this year was his 22nd birthday. Save for now being of legal age to marry in his hometown, there was nothing special about it. In addition, a hard-won war had just been fought in the Northwest and they were in the middle of taxation reform in the south, their treasury was under great constraints. Jiang Xing was of the opinion that a simple perfunctory celebration would be enough.

When the empress dowager heard this, she said, feeling gratified, "The emperor has learned so much. He now knows how to consider the national economy and the people's livelihoods." As she spoke, tears welled up in her eyes, "The emperor has really grown up."

Lin Qingyu said, "Guan Taifu has taught His Majesty well."

Whenever her son was mentioned, the empress dowager who handled matters with the power of a thunderbolt and the speed of lightning, shone from head to toe with the brilliance of motherhood. Jiang Xing's every progress, no matter how big or small, moved her to tears. Like Shen Huaishi and Xiao

Cheng, Xi Rong and Xiao Jie, Xiao Li—or rather Jiang Xing with his lost his soul, was the empress dowager's greatest weakness.

It has to be said that Jiang Xing's use of these six people's relationship, taking these as the general rules of "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch" was truly clever. Lin Qingyu relied the on the principle of 'everything has its nemesis' to exploit their feelings, enabling him and Jiang Xing to get where they were today.

But people are never satisfied. In the past, the empress dowager's only wish was for her son to call her 'mother', then she also hoped that he could learn to read and write like ordinary children. Now, she wished he could take over the reins of government as soon as possible and become a true emperor.

Although the Dayu didn't have a precedent for a dullard emperor, they have had a child emperor before, Emperor Yuwen. Emperor Yuwen ascended the throne at the age of seven and took charge at the age of seventeen. During this period, his imperial mother, the Empress Dowager Xiao En, managed the government behind the curtain. After Emperor Yuwen grew up, the Empress Dowager Xiao En refused to hand over power for a long time. It was delayed

until Emperor Yuwen's wedding, when the officials then grew furious and the Empress Dowager Xiao En had no choice but to concede.

Thinking of this, the empress dowager said, "The emperor is no longer young. It is time to pick some suitable people to fill his harem."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Doesn't Her Highness think of His Majesty as a child? Mentally speaking, the Emperor is only ten years old."

The empress dowager said, "How can this kind of thing be calculated according to one's mental age? Based on Prime Minister Lin's words, then people who remain dullards all their lives shouldn't be allowed to marry and have children."

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "This minister did not say that. But making someone empress is no small matter. Does the empress dowager have a suitable candidate?"

The empress dowager harbored a selfish desire — to cement old ties through marriage. She meant for a girl from the Wen Family to take the position of empress. But even in front of Lin Qingyu, she couldn't reveal her intentions too openly. "The matter of choosing an empress naturally must be considered at length. Aijia simply thinks that the Emperor should first understand human affairs…Qingyu, what do you think?"

Discussing matters between man and woman with Lin Qingyu was useless and she knew it as well. It was merely a perfunctory gesture. Lin Qingyu was a

smart person so it wasn't possible that he would fail to understand her meaning.

Lin Qingyu was noncommittal. "There is no need for the Empress Dowager to ask this minister's opinion. The minister has no opinion on the matter."

The empress dowager smiled and said, "In this case, Aijia will have people make the preparations."

A few days later, a group of newcomers arrived at Xingqing Palace. Most of these were youthful ladies, all beautiful in their own right, all free for His Majesty's choosing. They were ordered by the empress dowager to serve in the inner palace. Jiang Xing acquiesced to this bit of schemeing but he allowed none of them to serve him personally. The were only allowed to serve tea and pour water.

Xiu Jiao momo had been entrusted with orders by the empress dowager. She found an opportunity to speak in front of Jiang Xing, "Your Majesty, you shouldn't rely on Xiao Songzi alone to take care of you. Xiao Songzi will be

tired too." Like coaxing a child, "Look at that maid named Shi Wei, isn't she pretty? Shi Wei also wants to serve the emperor."

Jiang Xing shook his head and brought out Guan Taifu's teachings. Children listen most to their teachers. "Teacher said that we should make a distinction between men and woman. Zhen cannot let them get close."

Xiu Jiao momo explained, "The emperor is the son of heaven, and all the people in the world belong to you. There is no need for His Majesty to make a distinction for them."

Jiang Xing's expression was the very peak of naivety. "Then Prime Minister Gege is also Zhen's man?"

Xiu Jiao momo was stunned. She forced a smile, "Prime Minister Lin is different, he is the wife of General Gu."

Jiang Xing said in a "childlike manner", "But isn't General Gu already dead?"

Xiu Jiao momo was flustered and she quickly changed the subject, "Why doesn't His Majesty want Shi Wei and the others to serve you?"

Jiang Xing frowned. "I don't like the smell of them. Their smells make me feel

unwell. It's even worse when they touch me."

Xiu Jiao momo's face turned pale and she murmured, "How could this be?"

At this time, a slightly cold voice came, "What are you talking about?"

Jiao momo turned around and saw Lin Qingyu. She hurriedly bowed and saluted, "Your Excellency."

Lin Qingyu gave a salute to Jiang Xing and then turned to Xiu Jiao momo. "His Majesty should be attending to his schoolwork right now. Xiu Jiao momo came to Qinzheng Palace but seems not to have any matter of import to do here."

"This servant was ordered by the empress dowager to bring some snacks to the emperor."

It was well known that Lin Qingyu had a cold and arrogant temper but he has always been polite in front of the empress dowager. As the empress dowager's confidant, Xiu Jiao momo has always been treated to Lin Qingyu's milder side. At this moment, she could feel Lin Qingyu's gaze falling on her, mighty pressure exerted by one in a position of power made her almost breathless. For

the first time, she clearly realized that Lin Qingyu's position as the top official did not depend only on his face and luck.

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Now that you've given it, you can go back. The emperor is busy with his studies and has no time to chat."

"……Yes."

As soon as Xiu Jiao momo left, Jiang Xing took off his childish mask and said with a smile, "The prime minister is here."

Lin Qingyu glanced at the snacks on the table. "Did the momo come to teach His Majesty about human affairs?"

"Zhen has no need for others to teach me that." Jiang Xing yawned, "Lord Prime Minister has already taught me."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "How could this minister teach that to His Majesty? I dare say, the emperor was self-taught."

Lin Qingyu's bad mood was within Jiang Xing's expectation. Luckily, he was prepared. He patted his leg and said, "Baobei, come and sit."

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "No, I'm very busy. I have a pile of reports waiting for

me to read."

Jiang Xing smiled. "Oh those, I've already finished reading them for you."

Lin Qingyu was somewhat surprised. "Really?"

"If you don't believe me, you can go check."

Lin Qingyu went to the desk and flipped through a few of the reports. Sure enough, there were all written with replies and criticisms in blue ink. He turned to look again at Jiang Xing, yawning non-stop, looking like he hasn't had enough sleep. Lin Qingyu's heart softened and he took the initiative to apologize to Jiang Xing, "Sorry, I shouldn't lose my temper with you. But I…"

"I know, you can't help it. It's alright, you look gorgeous when you lose your temper." Jiang Xing took Lin Qingyu's hand and led him to sit on his lap, "I know you want to study Gu techniques but don't have the time. I've invited back that genius doctor from the Southern border. You can take a few days off to work with him on the 'Capital's dissertation on Gu'. As for morning court,

I'll help you deal with it. If there's anything I'm not sure about, I'll make sure to ask you."

Lin Qingyu looked at him quietly.

Jiang Xing asked, "Why are you looking at me like that?"

Lin Qingyu said softly, "I think you really like me." He knew how much Jiang Xing hated getting tired but every time Jiang Xing got tired, it was all for him.

Jiang Xing just smiled. "You're only finding out now?" He raised his hand and touched Lin Qingyu's cheek with his fingertips, "Alright, go play and come back a little earlier tonight."

Free to do what he wanted, Lin Qingyu was in a good mood, "Then I'll take the doctor to the General's Mansion to see the little Gu's."

Seeing Lin Qingyu's pleased expression, Jiang Xing's sleepiness subsided a lot. The Gu obsessed Lin Qingyu was so cute. Though Jiang Xing wanted to sleep, he didn't have much time.

After successfully coaxing the great beauty, Jiang Xing rested his eyes a while. When he was about to pick up his brush and resume his fight, Xiao Songzi

came in offering freshly-brewed tea. “Your Majesty, please drink a cup of tea to refresh yourself.”

Jiang Xing was still thinking about Lin Qingyu and said worriedly, “I hope I managed to get Qingyu to cheer up.”

Xiao Songzi said, “This servant thinks Prime Minister Lin wouldn’t be angry over such a trivial matter.”

“You don’t know him. He’ll still get angry. He also knows that there is no need to be angry about this kind of thing, but he can’t help it. He won’t say anything about it but I must coax him nevertheless.”

Xiao Songzi couldn’t understand, but he was greatly shocked. “The emperor is wise.”

In Ci’an Palace, Xiu Jiao momo told the empress dowager of her conversation with the emperor. The Empress Dowager also thought it strange. A suspicion had begun to grow in her heart but on her lips flowed insistence that the

Emperor was merely too young mentally and didn't understand these things, which was why he'd said such words.

Lai Fu made a slip of the tongue. "Could it be that the emperor is…"

"What is it?"

"Thi-This servant dares not say."

The Queen Mother said irritably, "If you have anything to say, just say it."

Lai Fu said cautiously, "Please allow this servant to be so bold as to guess, but maybe the Emperor was born a cut sleeve? The… the kind of cut sleeves that can't bed a woman."

The queen mother frowned and said sharply, "Outrageous! Who allowed you to speak nonsense? Do you find your head too heavy to carry on your shoulders?"

Since the founding of the dynasty, male homosexuality has come in and out of fashion. In the past few years, the number of men who took male wives has been increasing. Most of these men did not abstain from having relationships with women as well. However, there were indeed some men who simply could not abide being with women.

Between men, it was called being a "cut sleeve"; between women, it was called being a "mirror grinder". The Empress Dowager thought of Emperor Wen's

Princess Changle. Even though she married a husband, she would break out in cold sweats and vomit profusely as soon as she had intercourse with him. However, she showed none of these problems when she beds a woman.

Lai Fu hurriedly knelt down and kowtowed repeatedly, “This servant begs forgiveness, forgiveness please.”

The Empress Dowager closed her eyes and said, “We’ll wait for another two years, until the Emperor’s mind becomes a little more mature.”

Xiu Jiao momo considered the matter and said, “The Emperor like great beauties otherwise how could he only smile whenever he saw Prime Minister Lin Xiang when he was still sick? For the past two years, Prime Minister Lin has stayed by the Emperor’s side. With Prime Minister Lin by his side, it is only reasonable that His Majesty would look down on all other beauties.”

The implication was that Master Lin had set the emperor’s standard so high that ordinary beauties simply couldn’t catch his attention all. However, if you looked around the capital, where could you find anyone who could compete with Lin Qingyu’s beauty?

The empress dowager considered it for a while and felt that what Xiu Jiao momo said was somewhat reasonable. “At first, it was because the National Teacher said that Prime Minister Lin could help the emperor recover so Aijia allowed Prime Minister Lin to stay in Xingqing Palace’s side hall. Now the emperor is well. It’s about time, I’m afraid it’s inappropriate for Prime Minister Lin to be staying in the emperor’s palace any longer. Prime Minister

Lin to put it mildly, is the emperor's cousin's wife. It is best that we avoid any suspicion."

Xiu Jiao momo echoed, "What the empress dowager said is absolutely true."

The empress dowager took a deep breath. "After all, the emperor's mind is different from others. This matter is not urgent. We can only take it one step at a time."

In the blink of an eye, it was the emperor's birthday. Although Jiang Xing said that he wanted only a simply celebration, it was after all, his first Longevity Day. Some extravagance had to be given to the occasion.

On this day, the palace was decorated with lanterns and colored banners, singing and dancing continued unending. The maids and eunuchs all wore new clothes, embroidered with objects of auspicious meanings. When the time came, the emperor climbed up Hua'e Tower to be congratulated by all the officials.

Lin Qingyu, the representative of the ministers, came with wine cup in hand, wishing the emperor limitless blessings and long life.

Jiang Xing looked intently at Lin Qingyu. With a smile on his lips and eyes shining bright, he raised his own cup and said, "Today marks the day of Zhen's birth. It is like being reborn. Everything that has come to past is but preamble.

Prime Minister, let us celebrate together my recovery from my old illnesses and let us wish that from this day forth everything should go smoothly.

——He has recovered from his old illness and everything should now go smoothly.

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly.

Yes, so long as his beloved man was always by his side, old illnesses, no matter how painful, will heal one day.

The author has something to say: San Zhuang is finally eighteen again!

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Chapter 114

After nightfall, the son of heaven held a banquet for his ministers in Hua'e Tower. The emperor sat in the main seat, the prime minister and the empress dowager were on his left and right. The officials and nobles were on either sides of the hall. After the first cup of wine, the entertainers entered the stage. Music begun to play and beautiful women danced. This dance was performed so gracefully, tripping lightly like startled swans, like dragons swimming through water. When people watched them, their eyes couldn't help but sparkle, their attention wholeheartedly caught. The leading dancer was the very girl painstakingly selected by the empress dowager and ordered to serve in Xingqing Palace.

The empress dowager would glance at the emperor from time to time. She saw that the emperor was more interested in eating than watching the beautiful dancers. But what interested him the most was undoubtedly the Prime Minister sitting on his left.

Lin Qingyu had a low tolerance for alcohol. After just a few cups of wine, he was already a little tipsy. He was beautiful to begin with, now slightly intoxicated, his coldness melted away. His face became more beautiful and

radiant, his slender lashes drooped, his cheeks were stained a light pink. At the corners of his eyes inexplicably appeared a bit of spring color.

The most terrible thing was that he had on the crane embroidered uniform of their highest minister. Such a great beauty was actually the prime minister of their court.

Not only the emperor, many of the officials couldn't help but cast frequent looks at the prime minister. Especially Li Chan, the vice ministry of war, who practically hadn't taken his eyes off of him. These people probably thought

their esteemed prime minister was more worthy of admiring than any of the entertainers.

The Empress Dowager was in a delicate mood. She smiled and said, “His Majesty recovered from his illness so quickly. It is in no small thanks to your efforts, Qingyu.”

Lin Qingyu, who had been drinking, reacted a little slower, “The empress dowager gives undue praise. It is but what this minister should have done.”

“Even Aijia is no longer so polite with you. After all, we are all one family. If Wancheng were still alive, the emperor would be calling you ‘Biao Sao‘.”

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. “If the Emperor so wishes.”

Before the empress dowager could react, Jiang Xing obediently called out, “Biao Sao.”

The empress dowager was somewhat struck stupid. Sitting not far away, Shen Huaishi, who had superb hearing, almost spit out his mouthful of wine upon hearing this.

Once the music ended and the audience dispersed, Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing, under the empress dowager’s complicated gaze, left the banquet together and returned to Xingqing Palace.

Both of them were a little tipsy. Jiang Xing sent the palace servants away, sat

down on the dragon bed and irritably tore off the clasps on the dragon robe. “It’s finally over.”

Lin Qingyu asked him, “Why did you send Xiao Songzi away? With him gone, who’ll help you get ready for bed.”

“I can take care of it myself.” Jiang Xing lay on the bed. Resting one hand on his chest, he looked at Lin Qingyu with a smile, “Biao Sao is so pretty; everyone was looking at you during the dinner.”

Lin Qingyu frowned. “They dared?”

“No, that’s why they were watching you secretly.” Jiang Xing laughed, “Only I can look at you openly.”

Lin Qingyu sat down beside the bed. “Don’t lie down. Go take a bath and change your clothes first.”

“I’m so tired, I don’t want to move.”

Lin Qingyu was puzzled, “You only stood for a little bit today, why are you tired?”

“It has nothing to do with standing or sitting. For some people, sitting for eight to ten hours a day, can make them doggone tired. Social engagements, keeping

up appearances, putting on an act are all very exhausting."

"Then you should rest early."

Jiang Xing felt very conflicted. "But I want it."

Lin Qingyu momentarily speechless. "You also said you're tired."

Jiang Xing had a flash of inspiration. He said, teasingly, "We can… do it with our thoughts. We can pretend to do it. This way, we won't be tired and we can solve our desires. What do you think?"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Jiang Xing closed his eyes and said while imagining the scene, "I'm sitting up. I raise my hand and untie the jade belt around your waist. I'm sliding off your minister's uniform from your shoulders and then…"

Lin Qingyu suppressed a smile. "Alright, alright. I'm done."

You're here now? Jiang Xing said, astounded, "But I only just took off your official uniform. I haven't even…"

"En, I'm fast." Lin Qingyu said, perfunctory, "Once you're done, go to bed. You

have an early day tomorrow."

"But that hardly seems enough." Jiang Xing complained, "I'm not happy at all."

Lin Qingyu laughed. "You are the one who's too tired. I'm not the one who's unwilling. Who are you trying to blame?"

Jiang Xing struggled again and again; he said, throwing caution to the wind, "Forget it, so what if I'm a little tired?" After saying so, he sat up resignedly, placing his hands on Lin Qingyu's sides, "Who made me so weak?"

Lin Qingyu blocked his approaching lips and said coolly: "If you're so reluctant, I'll feel like I am forcing you."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "I am completely willing, though I do wish you'd be a bit more proactive."

Lin Qingyu sneered, "Am I not being proactive enough? Back then…"

Jiang Xing knew that Lin Qingyu was going to bring up his rejection when Lin Qingyu had offered when he was still Gu Fuzhou. He dove forcefully in with a kiss to prevent Lin Qingyu from turning over old accounts.

The aroma of the wine lingered in their mouths, deepening their intoxication.

After kissing for a while, Lin Qingyu pushed Jiang Xing away. He turned his head, seeming a little shy, "I ordered someone to prepare a hot soaking bath.

Would you like to take a dip? It will help dissipate the effects of the alcohol."

Jiang Xing was surprised and delighted. His exhaustion was swept clear away. "Baobei has some tricks up his sleeve…"

Lin Qingyu instantly dropped all expression from his face. "Are you going or not?"

"I'm going." Jiang Xing rolled over and got off the bed, his movements, crisp and neat, "If only I could run to there fast as the wind."

The imperial palace, unlike the summer palace, had no natural hot spring. They'd had to make a man-made bath. Numerous workers dug a pool in the bath house and filled it with hot water. When the two arrived, everything was ready. The entire bath house was filled with dense steam. It was hazy all around, like a mountain paradise. Bright red petals were even floating on the water's surface.

Forestalling Jiang Xing's attempt to make fun of him again, Lin Qingyu asked Xiao Songzi, "Who told you to put in flower petals?"

Xiao Songzi said, embarrassed, "Well, you didn't say not to. This servant arranged it according to the style of the imperial consort's bath." He originally

wanted arrange it in the style of the empress but felt that it might be a bit too much, so he changed it to the imperial concubine's style instead.

"I think it's good." Jiang Xing patted Xiao Songzi's shoulder, "I have a reward for you later. Let's get in first."

After Xiao Songzi left, Jiang Xing first tried the water temperature with his hand. After confirming that it was suitable, he said, "Imperial Consort Lin, would you like to go in first?"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows, "It turns out that in the heart of the Emperor, I am just an imperial consort."

"Though it is a stereotype, they do say that the empress is dignified and prudent while the imperial consort is lovely and charming. Tonight, Aiqing will be my imperial consort Lin and tomorrow morning, you will once again be my Empress Lin. When you become even gentler then you'll be Lin Shufei…"

…It really was the stereotype. Lin Qingyu untied the crown from his head and took off his official robes, leaving only a layer of inner clothing. He slowly stepped into the pool. When he didn't hear the sound of Jiang Xing following

after him, he turned around. He saw the other party still standing there. He asked, “What’s wrong?”

Jiang Xing said in disbelief, “Are we here to have fun? Why are you wearing clothes to soak in the hot spring bath?”

Lin Qingyu said, “You have to wear clothes in the hot springs. Don’t tell me that in your hometown, people don’t wear clothes in the hot springs?”

Jiang Xing said without hesitation, “We don’t.”

Lin Qingyu was a little surprised and his impression of Jiang Xing’s hometown shifted somewhat. He used to think that most of the people from Jiang Xing’s hometown were reserved and introverted; he didn’t expect that they also had an unrestrained side.

Jiang Xing followed the tradition of his hometown and got into the water with his torso bare. The water in the pool was not deep, reaching just to his chest.

He sat down opposite Lin Qingyu. With his body immersed in the warm water, most of the alcohol disappeared.

“Qingyu, look.” Jiang Xing took a deep breath and sank into the water, leaving visible only a tuft of short hair on the top of his head.

Lin Qingyu said, “Jiang Xing?”

Suddenly, water splashed in all directions. The young man emerged suddenly from the water. He casually wiped the water from his face and said, “I was just playing a game. It’s to see how long I could hold my breath. I used to be able to hold it for really long.”

It has been half a year since Jiang Xing cut his hair and it had grown long enough to reach his collarbones. Flicking his hair like some wet puppy, water

droplets splashed on Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu instinctively raised his hands to cover his face. “How bored you must have been then.”

Jiang Xing narrowed his water-filled eyes. He said, carelessly, “I used to be… quite bored. I didn’t have much interest in doing anything. So I want to thank you, for allowing me find something that I enjoy and could never tire of.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “And what’s that?” Even when it came to love, Jiang Xing, like him, only ever says like, it was never to the point of obsession.

“Liking you, it’s the only thing I won’t ever tire of.”

Just as Lin Qingyu was about to feel moved, he heard Jiang Xing add, “Oh, besides sleeping.”

…

Jiang Xing re-did his confession, “Liking you and sleeping are the only two things that won’t ever tire of no matter how long I do them.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. “Thank you, Your Majesty, for your kindness.”

Jiang Xing probably also felt that his confession was a bit ridiculous. He lowered his head and chuckled. Moving his hands around in the water, he

sighed, “Qingyu, I’ve become an adult again.”

Lin Qingyu smiled. “Congratulations.”

Jiang Xing saw that Lin Qingyu was in a good mood, so he couldn’t help himself from posing a death-seeking question, “Are you not jealous that the empress dowager asked that palace maid to lead the dance today?”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes, “And who does the emperor think looks better, me or her?”

“Of course, you.”

“That’s right.” Lin Qingyu exhaled a hot breath, “If the emperor left me to lust after someone else, the only possible explanation would be eye disease.”

Lin Qingyu’s face was flushed red from the steam. It was a kind of beauty different from his usual, a beauty that could astonish — it even had a hint of

danger, almost like that of a villain. A single look could draw you in deep, never to resurface.

Jiang Xing spent some time admiring this beautiful scene. When he spoke, his voice had turned down low, “I really like how confident you are.”

Water splashed and Lin Qingyu saw Jiang Xing walking towards him. Water droplets slipped from the hair on the young man’s forehead. The young man was nimble and full of limitless vitality.

Then, Lin Qingyu was picked up by this young man.

As he was pushed to the edge of the pool, Lin Qingyu wrapped his arms around Jiang Xing’s neck and asked, “Aren’t you tired? Can you still hold me?”

Jiang Xing thought for a while and said, half-truthfully, “I’m exhausted but I’m willing to work hard.”

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Chapter 115

After half an hour, the water ripples gradually stopped. The dragon robe embroidered with circling dragons covered Lin Qingyu's body. Then, he was carried out of the bath by Jiang Xing.

Lin Qingyu thought that Jiang Xing was going to take him back to Xingqing Palace. Although he wasn't a stickler for trivial matters, he didn't want to be

carried back by Jiang Xing while wrapped in the dragon robe. If anyone saw them, it would cause absolute scandal. “Put me down, I can walk by myself.”

Jiang Xing gave no answer. Lin Qingyu met his eyes and couldn’t help being taken aback.

Gone was the sparkle of youth from Jiang Xing’s eyes. They could no longer be called gentle rather there was now something in them that was of a mature man.

——That’s right. After all, he had entered adulthood once again. The combination of a twenty-two-year-old heart and an eighteen-year-old body was inexplicably arousing.

He also liked Jiang Xing like this a lot. Lin Qingyu took the initiative to lean over and lightly bit the mole where Jiang Xing’s Adam’s apple lay.

Jiang Xing’s Adam’s apple bobbed and his breathing turned heavier. The next moment, Lin Qingyu’s back hit the screen with a bang. But he didn’t feel any pain — Jiang Xing had put his hand behind his back to protect him.

Lin Qingyu’s half-wet long hair hung down. The dragon robe slipped off his shoulders, coming loose and undone, creating a boundless spring scenery.

Jiang Xing couldn’t help but say, “Qingyu, you look so beautiful, so beautiful

even in this dragon robe."

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes and smiled, "Is there anything that doesn't look good on me?"

Jiang Xing's breathing suddenly went tight and he stopped talking. He said, short and straight to the point, "Hold on tight to me."

They carried on until well past midnight. When Lin Qingyu returned to the dragon bed, he insisted his hair be dried before going to bed, "It's all too easy to catch a cold if you go to bed with wet hair. If you make it a habit, you might suffer from headaches."

Jiang Xing yawned as he towel dried Lin Qingyu's hair. His hair was short and had quickly dried; while Lin Qingyu's long hair had to be brushed for a long time. In order to stop himself from falling asleep, Jiang Xing discussed a serious matter with Lin Qingyu. "Qingyu, you must have seen how the empress dowager was acting at the banquet today. She must be starting to object to how I cling to you all day long. It probably won't be long before she takes action. I think it's time for us to nip that thought in the bud."

Lin Qingyu asked: "How do you propose to do that?"

"I've got a rough plan."

Jiang Xing told Lin Qingyu his thoughts and Lin Qingyu listened carefully. From time to time, he supplemented details and offered suggestions for

improvement.

At the end, Lin Qingyu said, “The empress dowager is very kind to you and you want to lie to her?”

Jiang Xing said in surprise, “You really have changed. Having misgivings about lying to someone, this isn’t your style.”

Lin Qingyu said, “I didn’t have a choice before, but now I want to be a good person.”

“You’re already a ‘good person’.” Jiang Xing remembered something, “I heard that Xiao Jie’s madness has been cured. He suddenly lost his memory and forgot the past. Is this your handiwork?”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “I was merely testing out on him a Gu technique the genius doctor from the Southern border passed on to me. It wasn’t a good

deed. He was just lucky. If his luck had been bad, he would have gone to join Xi Rong already."

Jiang Xing smiled, but didn't expose the beautiful villain's rare display of soft-heartedness. How could he not know that it was for him that Lin Qingyu was willing to show some sympathy for these insignificant people?

Jiang Xing turned the topic back to the empress dowager. "Anyway, this is the easiest and most convenient method I can think of. Besides, I'm really not deceiving her."

"How do you say that?"

Jiang Xing said seriously, "If she forces me to separate from you, I really will go crazy."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "Alright. We'll let her panic a bit and I'll forget about how she used an imperial decree to force me to marry Lu Wancheng before."

Jiang Xing wasn't at all surprised and he said with a smile, "You really know how hold grudges. That was five years ago and you're still thinking about that."

Thinking of how it's been five years, Lin Qingyu smiled, "It's been five years… we're doing bad things together again."

Before, it was in the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, then it was in the General's

Mansion and now it was in the Imperial Palace.

Jiang Xing objected, “I just want to marry my wife and bring him home, what’s bad about that?” Jiang Xing judged his hair to be almost dry. He took off the towel and caressed Lin Qingyu’s hair. “Why is it still a little wet?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Drying long hair is difficult.”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “In any case, since we can’t sleep yet why don’t we pick up where we left off?”

Lin Qingyu: “…” Just how could this person claim to be exhausted?

If someone were standing in the hall at this moment, they would see two figures behind the curtain of the dragon bed. The long-haired man sat within the arms of the short-haired man. The shadows’ movements weren’t too fast

but it made the long-haired man's back stretch into a seductive arc, after which he fell limp against the short-haired man's chest.

When they were done, Lin Qingyu's long hair was finally dry. The two were lying under the same quilt, facing each other, staring into each other's eyes.

Jiang Xing's eyes stared fixedly on Lin Qingyu's face for a moment. He then asked, "Qingyu, don't you want to sleep yet?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Not yet, I'm still fine."

"Then, are you tired?"

Lin Qingyu said, on guard, "Don't tell me you want to go again?"

"In every novel I've read, the receiver would always faint or go dizzy after they've done their lovemaking." Jiang Xing was a little frustrated, "How come you're still able to carry on a proper conversation with me?"

Lin Qingyu was baffled. "Stories are stories and reality is reality. How can someone pass out so easily? If it reaches the point that someone loses consciousness then we've got a really big problem."

But although he wasn't dizzy, he was really tired. His whole body seemed to be falling apart and his voice was hoarse. In contrast, a certain someone kept

saying that he was tired but was much more spirited than he was.

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows, “So, it’s not my fault? Have these novels misled me?”

“En.” Lin Qingyu raised his hand with difficulty, stroked Jiang Xing’s short hair and said lazily, “His Majesty is already amazing. I enjoyed it very much.”

Jiang Xing laughed. “I can go another round. Baobei, next time, you should praise me more.”

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly and said, “Alright.”

With the coming of winter, the capital quickly got their first snow fall of the season. Jiang Xing paid close attention to Lin Qingyu’s mood. It was business as usual for Lin Qingyu or at least it seemed to be so. But as Gu Fuzhou’s death anniversary approached, Lin Qingyu suddenly fell ill.

Lin Qingyu’s illness was severe. The person who came to report to the palace said that he had reached the point of being confined to his bed, unable to get up to attend morning court, much less preside over it. The emperor noticed

the prime minister's absence from Xingqing Palace, so he ran to Ci'an Palace to look for him, "Mother, where is Prime Minister Gege?"

The empress dowager patiently explained to the emperor, "Prime Minister Lin is ill and is recuperating in the General's Mansion."

"Then can I go to the General's Mansion to see him?"

"The emperor is the son of heaven and must stay in the palace." The queen mother comforted, "His Majesty shouldn't worry. When Prime Minister Lin recovers, he will come back."

She had no wish for Lin Qingyu to get sick. But Lin Qingyu's illness provided a good opportunity to separate him from the emperor for a period of time which was in line with her wishes.

The emperor was momentarily dazed and then his eyes dimmed, as if they had lost their brilliance. Seeing him like this, the empress dowager's heart suddenly sank – the emperor's eyes looked somewhat similar to when he was suffering from his soul-loss disease. But taking a closer look, it seemed she had seen wrong.

The empress dowager thought she was thinking too much but who would have thought that, unable to see the Prime Minister, His Imperial Majesty became depressed and stayed gloomy the rest of the day. He talked less and less until he

uttered not even a single word. Imperial Physician Xuan came to examine him but could find no reason for his condition.

A terrifying thought rose in her heart — could it be that the emperor's mental illness had relapsed?

The empress dowager hurriedly asked someone to invite the national teacher to come. Who would have thought that Xu Junyuan had already left the capital a year ago and would not be able to return until a few days later. The empress

dowager watched as the emperor become less and less animated day after day. Her heart was burning with anxiety but she had no other choice but to wait.

As soon as Xu Junyuan returned to the capital, he was hurriedly invited into the palace by Lai Fu. There, Xu Junyuan, immediately caught sight of Young Master Jiang squatting on the ground playing with mud.

Xu Junyuan lifted open Young Master Jiang's eyelids and took a look. Before he had even finished, the Empress Dowager already couldn't help asking, "What has happened to the emperor?"

Xu Junyuan thought it over and said, "The emperor's current symptoms are indeed somewhat similar to his previous soul-less disease."

The empress dowager said anxiously, "But wasn't His Majesty's diseases already cured?"

"Dare I ask Her Highness, is Prime Minister Lin not in the palace these days?"

The empress dowager was puzzled, "It is true that Prime Minister Lin has been sick and absent from the palace. But what does this have to do with the emperor's mental illness?"

"Prime Minister Lin is the first person who was able to get a reaction out of His Majesty. He is very important for the emperor's soul-loss. Because of this, I suggest that you have Prime Minister Lin stay by the emperor's side. A person's three immortal souls and six spirits is a mystery within a mystery.

Even I cannot glimps it in its entirety. Perhaps Prime Minister Lin is the emperor's sole unique antidote; this we cannot be sure of."

The empress dowager couldn't accept it, "Lin Qingyu used to be Lu Wancheng's wife. He was also Gu Fuzhou's wife and now he is the prime minister of the court. How can he always be with the emperor in the palace?"

Xu Junyuan sighed, and said: "Your Highness Empress Dowager, forgive me for speaking bluntly. When the emperor was missing his soul, you once said that if the emperor could call you 'mother', you would ask for nothing else. That the emperor's mind was able to gradually return to normal is an unexpected miracle. The emperor likes being0 with Prime Minister Lin. Why

would you stop him? Could it be that you would rather see the emperor return to how he was before than to have him like Prime Minister Lin?"

How he was before?

No-no… Her Li'er has finally reached this state. He definitely cannot return to being dull and dazed, as though he were off living in another world.

The empress dowager slumped to the ground. After a long while, she came back to her senses, "Quick, go bring Prime Minister Lin here!"

Lai Fu reminded her, "Empress Dowager, Prime Minister Lin is still ill."

"Then we'll take His Majesty to the General's Mansion." The empress dowager urged, "Hurry!"

The author has something to say: Ah, I tried my best. _(:3 」∠)_

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Chapter 116

Lai Fu hastily packed the emperor's luggage for his trip out of the palace. The empress dowager wished more than anything to follow the emperor to the General's Mansion but out of concern over her own identity, she ultimately decided against it. Instead, she ordered Xu Junyuan to accompany the emperor.

Jiang Xing's muddy hands were washed clean by Xiao Songzi. Then, completely at the mercy of the servants, he was made to change into ordinary robes. Lai Fe then helped him into the carriage. While the two weren't paying attention, Jiang Xing's sluggish eyes suddenly congealed with intellect, which Xu Junyuan quickly noticed. Xu Junyuan, understanding implicitly, said, "I shall ride with the emperor. His Majesty will be completely safe in my care."

They set off for the General's Mansion. Lai Fu and Xiao Songzi were seated outside, driving and steering the carriage, while Xu Junyuan and Jiang Xing sat

inside. Deliberately keeping their voices low, the sound of clattering horse hooves was enough to drown out their conversation.

“This humble minister is overwhelmed by Your Majesty’s trust.” Xu Junyuan said helplessly, “You didn’t even tell me in advance. Weren’t you afraid I might spill the truth to Her Highness the empress dowager?”

Jiang Xing said, “Haven’t you always stood on Zhen’s side? Besides, even if you had told her the truth, the Empress Dowager might not necessarily believe you.”

Xu Junyuan let out a feigned sigh. “The emperor’s wisdom is all spent on how to marry Prime Minister Lin. If His Majesty were but to bend his mind towards government affairs, oh what a blessing it would be to the Dayu.”

“That’ll have to wait until I get to marry him back.” Jiang Xing said casually, “However, I’m still curious, why do you always help us?”

Xu Junyuan said calmly, “Because Jiang Gongzi’s lot is to be the ruler of all under heaven, the master of the throne. Since I am fortunate enough to get a glimpse of this mystery known only to heaven, naturally I will help Jiang Gongzi. Maybe if the son of heaven is pleased with my service, he will see it fit

to order renovations to Changsheng Temple. — To be honest, the meditation room where I practice my cultivation is a tad bit small."

Jiang Xing scoffed, "That's it?"

"That's it." Xu Junyuan smiled and said, "There is no need for the emperor to think highly of me. In the end, I am just a man of cultivation."

Jiang Xing laughed, not in any mood to banter with Xu Junyuan. Only the stupidest of fools would believe such nonsense. For these five long years, Xu Junyuan hasn't changed at all. He was still a mystery within a mystery.

In any case, his purpose has been achieved. A few days ago, the empress dowager was thinking up of every means to prevent him from clinging to his wife. Today, she was practically pushing him to his wife's house. It hadn't been in vain that he played with enough mud to build another Xingqing Palace.

After the news of Lin Qingyu's illness spread, many officials sent letters expressing their wish to visit the sick. All though were turned away. The gifts they sent to the mansion were returned one by one.

When the emperor's carriage stopped at the gate of the General's Mansion, Lin Qingyu was in the middle of preparing a winter nest for the two little Gu's.

He didn't know if it was because of Jiang Xing's influence but he was beginning to like this kind of leisurely life. There was no need to go to court, no need to worry about state affairs, and no need to meet all kinds of officials

of the court. When he had nothing to do, he read medical books or formulated prescriptions; occasionally, he would have discussions about Gu with the genius doctor from the Southern border. He could even go to the Imperial Medical Office to teach a few classes. This was much more interesting than being the court's prime minister.

After resting for a few days, he had a new view on the word "salted fish". Being "salted fish" wasn't doing nothing. Rather, it was being free from the pressure of external forces, having one's time at one's own disposal. Jiang Xing's hobbies were playing and sleeping. If he wasn't allowed to play and sleep, he would get tired. While his hobby was medicine. If he was made to abandon his medical skills and turn his mind exclusively to other things, he would also get tired.

Put this way, he also wanted to be salted fish. It was a pity that there had to be someone between him and Jiang Xing to worry about "external forces" so that the other can be salted fish with no other distractions.

"Qingyu." Mother Lin came in with a bowl of bird's nest soup, "Come. This is fresh from the pot. Have a taste."

Mother Lin heard that her eldest son was ill, so she went to visit the General's Mansion. When Lu Wancheng passed away of illness, Lin Qingyu suffered

from a bout of serious illness. Seeing that the anniversary of General Gu's death was approaching, she felt really worried.

Fortunately, Lin Qingyu was suffering from a seasonal cold, his condition was far from being bedridden. Mother Lin didn't know why Lin Qingyu lied about

being seriously ill, but he must have his reasons for doing so. She and her husband have never interfered with their eldest son's decisions.

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "Thank you, mother."

Monther Lin was now the prime minister's mother and thus, a titled lady, but her life carried on as usual. She was always thinking about doing things for her sons. Some things should be told to family in advance.

Lin Qingyu took a couple of sips and said, "Mother."

As soon as Mother Lin heard Lin Qingyu's tone, she knew that he had something to say. She said softly, "What's the matter?"

Lin Qingyu considered his words, "I… want to have one last marriage."

Mother Lin was momentarily stunned. Remembering the reason for Lin Qingyu's second marriage, she said nervously, "Is there anyone who's forcing you again?"

Lin Qingyu smiled and shook his head. "No. This time, I am doing so completely out of my own free will."

Not because of some imperial decree or to avoid someone who was coveting him — He sincerely wanted to marry Jiang Xing again.

Mother Lin was surprised and also puzzled. She knew very well her eldest

son's temperament. He was cold and indifferent to others, his tenderness was reserved only for those he cared about. He had obviously taken both Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou into his heart, so how was this was able to squeeze past his two predecessors and get Lin Qingyu to say the words 'completely out of my own free will'?

But when she saw Lin Qingyu's inadvertent tenderness, her heart softened. She still didn't ask much, only saying, "Since it's your wish, I don't think Young

Master Hou and General Gu would mind." She could see the respect these two had had for Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu smiled. "Indeed."

While mother and son were talking, they heard Huan Tong's voice from outside, "Madam, the emperor is here!"

Mother Lin was surprised. "Why would His Majesty come to the General's Mansion?"

Lin Qingyu laughed softly. "Who knows? Let's go and have a look."

Lin Qingyu took the whole family to pick him up at the door. Seeing Jiang Xing, he coughed softly, knelt down and saluted. He said, voice weak, "This humble minister greets His Majesty."

Instantly, brilliance reappeared in Jiang Xing's gloomy eyes. Lin Qingyu felt amused when he saw it – such acting skills; he himself couldn't compare.

"Prime Minister Gege," Jiang Xing hugged Lin Qingyu's waist in front of everyone and said with a smile, "I've caught you now."

Lin Qingyu tried his best to look surprised. "Your Majesty?"

Everyone looked at each other in dismay. Only Xu Junyuan sighed and said,

“This is Heaven’s will.”

Seeing this, Lai Fu quickly sent someone back to the palace to report to the empress dowager. Mixed feelings in the empress dowager’s heart upon hearing this. The National Teacher was right; Lin Qingyu was the emperor’s only cure. After a good long time, she heaved a long sigh. “So long as the emperor is well, Aijia no longer cares about anything else.”

This time, she truly accepted it. So long as the emperor’s soul loss disease does not recur, the emperor can cling to whoever he wants.

Afterwards, the Empress Dowager sent a message to the General’s Mansion, asking Lin Qingyu to move into the palace for the duration of his recuperation. However, Lin Qingyu declined on the grounds that “outside ministers were not allowed to stay overnight in the palace”. The empress dowager was baffled. Lin Qingyu had already been staying at the palace for far longer than just a day or two. What was the use of bringing up this rule at this time? Lin Qingyu didn’t want to go to the palace and the emperor couldn’t do without him. And so, the only solution was to have the emperor visit the General’s Mansion often. Wasn’t this an even bigger disregard of the rules?

After a few days, news of the emperor’s frequent visits to the General’s Mansion spread like wildfire. Many of those who disapproved of Lin Qingyu suddenly had a flash of realization. From the very beginning, this wasn’t the

prime minister overstepping his authority, rather the emperor pestering his minister cum minister's wife.

At this time, Jiang Xing was in General Gu's mansion, with his head resting on the laps of his 'minister's wife'. After hearing Xiao Songzi's report on the gossip in the capital, he said, "It's about time. It's time to move on to the next step. "

Lin Qingyu said, "Xiao Songzi, go and invite Shen Gongzi to come here."

Xiao Songzi acknowledged the command. Then, he heard the emperor ask him, "How did you find Shen Gongzi before?"

Xiao Songzi said, "Replying to His Majesty, Shen Gongzi has bought a courtyard in the capital. This servant usually sends a messenger there to look for him."

Jiang Xing was overtaken by a whim. "Qingyu, you've been staying in the mansion for so long. Aren't you bored? Why don't we go out for a short trip? Treat it as a visit to a friend."

A friend… Shen Huaishi was indeed a friend of the both of them.

Lin Qingyu nodded and ordered Yuan Yin to prepare a gift for visiting friends.

The two changed their clothes and went out in a carriage. Shen Huaishi's courtyard is located in quite a remote area, even on horseback, it would take an hour to reach. When he arrived at the place, Jiang Xing got out of the

carriage first. He then turned around and stretched out his hand. Lin Qingyu got out of the car holding his hand for support. They looked at the house in front of them.

It was a simple and unsophisticated house, like somewhere a wealthy but ordinary citizen would live. That it was away from the hustle and bustle of the crowds was also in line with Shen Huaishi's taciturn temperament.

Xiao Songzi was about to knock on the door when he heard a crazed and desperate voice from inside.

"I've thrown away everything, even my country for you! I've remained in this god-awful place for two years, just to see you but you won't even look at me

straight! Fine, alright! But now, you want to leave? Where will you go? —— Shen Huaishi, what do you think I am? A dog to look after your house!"

Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing looked at each other, their expressions inscrutable.

"Stop talking." Shen Huaizhi said calmly, "Someone's here."

It then fell quiet inside the house. Not long after, the door was opened. When Shen Huaishi saw them, he was not at all surprised, "Your subject greets Your Majesty and Your Excellency."

Lin Qingyu asked, "How did you know it was us?"

Shen Huaishi said, "The sound of the gears of the emperor's carriage is different from that of other carriages – Your Majesty, Prime Minister Lin, please come inside."

The two walked into the yard. They saw no one else except Shen Huaishi. Shen Huaishi invited them into the guest hall. He brewed a pot of tea and said, "There is only crude tea here. Prime Minister Lin might not be used to it."

Lin Qingyu took the teacup and then the lid. "Just now, I heard someone say you're leaving. Where are you going?"

Jiang Xing said casually, "Where else would he go? He wants to go back to the

Northwest."

Shen Huaishi pursed his lips. "After General Gu passed away, General Wu was ordered to stay and guard the Northwest. I should be able to help him if I go back."

Lin Qingyu was pensive. "I wanted you to rebuild the Heavenly Prison Sect. But if you insist on leaving…"

Shen Huaishi was stunned. "…Rebuild the Heavenly Prison Sate?"

"Although Xie Min and the Tianji Camp remain loyal only to the Son of Heaven, I still can't trust them because of the matter with Xi Rong and the change of power in the palace. I hope that after the reconstruction of the

Heavenly Prison Sect, it can compete with the Tianji Camp and even supersede it."

Jiang Xing joked, "It's your lifetime duty to recast the glory of the heavenly prison."

Lin Qingyu had said it so suddenly. Shen Huaizhi was not at all prepared. He thought for a while, then said hesitantly, "Your Majesty, Prime Minister Lin, will you allow me a few days to think about it?"

"Of course. Whether you want to leave or stay is all up to you." Lin Qingyu pointed out, "You do not need to take anyone else into account."

Jiang Xing said, "By the way, we've come here this time to ask one more thing of you."

On the day of Gu Fuzhou's death anniversary, the palace invited eminent monks from Changsheng Temple to chant scriptures and pray for Gu Fuzhou as a comfort for his departed spirit. Wu Zhan, Wu Guogong, Shen Huaishi, Li Chan and others were allowed by the empress dowager to come to Imperial Ancestral Temple to attend the ceremony and burn incense for Gu Fuzhou.

Lin Qingyu is Gu Fuzhou's wife and his only family member, but he was unable to attend such an important day due to illness. Afterwards, Li Chan suggested that they go to the General's Mansion to visit the prime minister. If he went alone, Prime Minister Lin would probably not meet with him, but

with so many confidants together, Prime Minister Lin might give them some face.

Shen Huaishi raised his head and looked at the snow falling from the darkened sky. He said, voice deep, “A year ago today, it was also on such a snowy day that the general…”

They were all carrying a heavy heart and they looked at each other, unable to say anything.

Shen Huaishi went on, “Yesterday, I dreamt about the General again. The General asked after Prime Minister Lin. He asked how he’d been this past year.

He didn't like seeing Prime Minister Lin getting sick from missing him. He didn't want him to remain and die alone."

Wu Zhan was emotionally moved. Recklessly pointing at himself, he said, "I-I dreamt about him too! The General wants us to strike at Xixia's capital, tear out the Xixia King's tongue, fry it and drink it with wine!"

After Shen Huaishi finished speaking the words they'd prepared in advance, he didn't know what else to say. After hesitating for a moment, he said, "Uh…my dream seemed so real, like a tuomeng."

"My dream felt more real." Wu Zhan, this big burly man, had eyes rimmed-red once again, "The General must have come back to see me…"

Wu Guogong seemed to think that Shen Huaishi's dream was more like a tuomeng and said, "It's been a year, Prime Minister Lin's period of marital piety has passed. It's time for me to fulfill Fuzhou's last wish."

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Chapter 117

When Shen Huaishi and others arrived at the General's Mansion, they were just in time to see a sedan chair stop at its gate. They didn't know which court official had the same idea and decided to come visiting on the anniversary of General Gu's death.

A middle-aged man with a big belly came out of the sedan chair, wearing the official uniform of a third-rank civil official. Wu Zhan and Wu Guogong were both yearlong residents in the capital but they have never seen this person. Li Chan introduced them, "This is the governor of Liang Zhou, Qian Xiyuan. He was ordered by the prime minister to come to the capital to report on his duties. He had just arrived two days ago."

When Qian Xiyuan saw them, a smile appeared on his face. "If it isn't Master Li and these esteemed generals! Have you also come to offer your greetings to the Lord Prime Minister?"

While they were exchanging pleasantries, Shen Huaishi couldn't help being taken aback when he saw a tall man with a tough face behind Qian Xiyuan. No one else seemed to have noticed the man. Not long after, Yuan Yin, having

gotten Lin Qingyu's consent, invited their group, along with Qian Xiyuan, into the mansion.

When the man made to follow after Qian Xiyuan into the mansion, he was stopped by Yuan Yin, "The Prime Minister only invited these gentlemen in. The rest will have to wait outside."

Qian Xiyuan hurried forward and whispered something in Yuan Yin's ear. Yuan Yin's expression froze. He looked at Qian Xiyuan with a pitying expression in his eyes. "Master Qian, please wait a moment. I'll have someone report to the Prime Minister."

Wu Zhan noticed the man's face and exclaimed, "This man…why, doesn't he look like the General?"

Qian Xiyuan laughed. "A coincidence, I assure you. Nothing but a coincidence."

Wu Zhan circled around the man. "He does look a bit similar, but the temperament is completely different."

Wu Zhan couldn't see Qian Xiyuan's intention but Li Chan knew it well and his face changed slightly. When the servant of the General's Mansion came

back and said that the prime minister had allowed the man to enter, Li Chan couldn't bear it. And muttered under his breath, "How utterly ridiculous."

In the Dayu, it was not unheard of for people to send beauties to high ranking officials to curry favor with them. Unexpectedly, Qian Xiyuan was so bold as to offer such a person to Prime Minister Lin. He didn't know whether to call him 'ingenious' or 'seeking his own doom'.

Wu Zhan asked, "Master Li, what's the matter with you?"

Shen Huaishi explained, "Master Qian had deliberately found a man who looked somewhat similar to the General with the intention of presenting him to Prime Minister Lin as a male favorite."

Li Chan said angrily, "How could he even think that this kind of person would be worthy of Prime Minister Lin? Presenting the Prime Minister with a male favorite, it is simply an insult to Prime Minister Lin."

Wu Zhan was never one to think much before he speaks. "Then who would be worthy?"

Li Chan froze and said after a long pause. "No one…no one is worthy." He smiled wryly and his voice gradually weakened, "One who could stand beside

Prime Minister Lin, even if it's not one as good as General Gu, at least can not… can not be as good as just me."

To him, Lin Qingyu was like a snow-capped mountain. He knew that he was not worthy to walk side by side with Lin Qingyu and his only wish was that

whoever stands beside Lin Qingyu could be someone he could accept. Otherwise, how could he be willing?

Wu Zhan didn't hear the bitterness in Li Chan's words and said, "If that's the way Master Li sees things, just how many people in the capital could possibly be better than you?"

As soon as these words fell, a voice sounded behind them,

"And what might my beloved ministers be talking about?" the young emperor said with a smile on his face, "Won't you let me listen in as well?"

No one thought that the emperor would be in the General's Mansion at this time. After their initial surprise, they all knelt down and said, "Greetings to Your Majesty."

Li Chan lowered his eyes and only the emperor's ebony clothes were in view. The dragon, embroidered with extremely fine gold thread, was exquisite and noble.

"You may all rise."

Li Chan stood up and only then saw that Lin Qingyu was standing behind the emperor. One was radiating splendor and the other was pure like an immortal who had brushed the dust of the mortal world from his feet. The impact of the

beauty of these two people was too great. The scene of them standing together made Li Chan a little dazed.

——Golden wind and jade dew

Jiang Xing glanced one by one at the gathered people and said, “Qian Xiyuan.”

Qian Xiyuan hastily stepped forward. “This humble minister is here.”

“I heard that you’ve prepared a gift for Prime Minister Lin?”

Qian Xiyuan quickly threw a look at Lin Qingyu, as if expecting him to say something for him, “Thi-this minister…”

Jiang Xing said with great interest, “I’m quite curious, show me.”

Qian Xiyuan knelt down with a thud. Cold sweat broke out throughout his body. Toughening his scalp, he said, “I simply didn’t want to see the Prime Minister become sick from longing, depressed and unhappy. I then made to be so bold as to find someone to bring comfort to the Prime Minister……”

“Someone to bring comfort.” Jiang Xing laughed but there was no smile on his face, “Prime Minister, do you need someone to comfort you?”

Li Chan suddenly realized that, at some point since, the emperor’s childlike manner had gradually diminished. His words and deeds were getting closer and closer to his actual age. The emperor was no longer a mentally

handicapped boy, he was a grown man and a true son of heaven. At this time, the emperor didn't seem to be in a very good mood, and the coldness emanating from his body made him dare not look directly at His Majesty.

But Lin Qingyu wasn't the least bit afraid. Lin Qingyu said to the man brought by Qian Xiyuan. "Raise your head."

The man raised his head, feeling anxious. In Lin Qingyu's eyes, there was nothing resembling Gu Fuzhou in his face. Lin Qingyu ordered, "Smile."

The man was just a butcher. Qian Xiyuan took a fancy to him because his appearance resembled Gu Fuzhou a little bit. He had been brought from Liang Zhou straight to the capital. He had never seen anything of the world. He forcefully forced a smile, showing his white teeth.

Lin Qingyu only took one look and then looked away. "What did you do before?"

"I-I was a butcher."

"Master Qian is so considerate." Lin Qingyu said, "Yuan Yin, ask if we have an opening for a butcher in the kitchens."

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows.

Wu Zhan grinned and remembered what they'd come here for. "Your Majesty, Lord Prime Minister, we came here to visit the sick. We heard that the prime

minister was laid up in bed. Why do you seem to be completely fine?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I am mostly recovered."

"With Zhen by the Lord Prime Minister's side, it is only natural that he would get better." Jiang Xing said, "But you gentlemen, have you nothing to do? Are the barracks and the Ministry of War so idle?"

They all looked at each other and said in unison, "We will be taking our leave."

When he was about to round the corridor, Li Chan couldn't help looking back – the emperor and the prime minister were still standing together. The emperor seemed to say something which made Prime Minister Lin smile. This

smile was tender and full of affection, with a charm and elegance that he had never seen before. Calling it radiant would not be an exaggeration.

It was as though Li Chan had woken from a dream.

In this entire world, apart from Lu Wancheng and Gu Fuzhou, the only one who was worthy of Lin Qingyu was the son of heaven.

Lin Qingyu was unaware that his smile was “tender and full of affection” in Li Chan’s eyes. He though he was sneering. “What kind of expression is that on your face?”

Jiang Xing was upset and felt justified at being so. “Why did you keep that person?”

Lin Qingyu said calmly, “I’m investigating Qian Xiyuan’s suspected corruption case. This person may be a clue.”

“Come on.” Jiang Xing pretended to be resentful, “Just tell me, are you missing Gu Fuzhou’s face?”

“As I said before, I have no feelings for Gu Fuzhou’s face. I loved the house and it’s crow because you were in that body.”

Jiang Xing asked again, “Then if we give no consideration for who’s inside,

what kind of face do you prefer?"

Lin Qingyu quickly picked up on what Jiang Xing wanted to hear, "I prefer Jiang Gongzi's."

Jiang Xing was satisfied. "You sure are a sweet talker. In view of the Prime Minister's words, I will definitely turn over the Prime Minister's tablet tonight."

It was night and Jiang Xing was staying over in the General's Mansion. Taking advantage of the dark night and high wind, with Xiao Songzi as cover, he snuck into Lin Qingyu's bedroom. With the brocade quilt between them, he hugged Lin Qingyu, "Qingyu, how about we carry on a clandestine affair?"

Lin Qingyu was lying on the bed, holding a medical book and reading it. He absent-mindedly, "We will after I finish reading."

"Okay, call me when you're done." Jiang Xing usually wouldn't disturb Lin Qingyu while he was reading. He sat down at the table, took out pen and paper and found something for himself to do.

After Lin Qingyu finished reading his book, he saw that Jiang Xing was drawing something. Walking over to see, he saw it was two rings, somewhat similar to the ones Gu Fuzhou had given him before but with some patterns

on the inside. One of the rings was engraved with a phoenix feather and the other echoed it with a sleeping dragon.

Jiang Xing asked, “Does it look good?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “It does.”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Then I’ll use this as an engagement ring. Is that alright?”

Lin Qingyu remembered that giving rings when proposing was a tradition in Jiang Xing’s hometown. “Alright.” He said, “When will it be cast?”

“It will probably take about half a month.” Jiang Xing yawned, “Let’s sleep, let’s sleep.”

Jiang Xing, in Gu Fuzhou’s body, had slept on this bed with Lin Qingyu for half a year. Except for going the last step, they had done everything on this bed. Lying here again, now in his own body again, with this beautiful widow

who has maintained his widowhood for a whole year, it would be a pity if they didn't do a little something.

The more Jiang Xing thought about it, the more excited he got. He licked the corner of his lips and asked, "Qingyu, do you still remember what you and Gu Fuzhou did on this bed?"

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, "We've done a lot."

"Then… have you ever done this before?"

"We have."

"How about this?"

Lin Qingyu's voice trembled slightly, "…Yes."

Jiang Xing sighed comfortably, "And this?"

"Don't, I-I can't bear it."

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows and deliberately said, "You can bear Gu Fuzhou's, why can't you bear mine?"

Lin Qingyu said without hesitation, "I've also never taken in his."

Jiang Xing found Lin Qingyu's reaction so cute. After staring at him for a

while, he laughed out loud and collapsed on Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu: "…?"

It seemed he had hit Jiang Xing's funny bone and Jiang Xing couldn't stop laughing. "I'm sorry, sorry, I shouldn't have laughed."

Lin Qingyu pushed him away expressionlessly, "Well, perfect timing. Today is your death anniversary. Let's go to bed early."

Jiang Xing once again propped himself up and hugged Lin Qingyu's around his waist. He pulled him to face him and said with a smile, "That won't do."

Lin Qingyu then lost all energy to think about Gu Fuzhou's death anniversary. He even woke up later than Jiang Xing the next day. After Jiang Xing finished

dressing, he sat on the edge of the bed and still terribly sleepy, said, “Baobei, I’m going back to the palace to get ready for morning court.”

Lin Qingyu gave a weak “en”.

“This is for you, thank you for agreeing to marry me.” Lin Qingyu felt something cold slip onto his finger. Jiang Xing kissed his forehead, “I love you, I’m going.”

After saying so, it seemed he felt it wasn’t enough, so he kissed his cheeks and the corners of his lips twice more. he then pushed aside the bed curtain and strode out.

Running after sleeping with him —— ah, what a slag man.

Lin Qingyu raised his hand and saw something extra on his left ring finger. It was the ring that Jiang Xing drew for him yesterday.

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Chapter 118

After the anniversary of Gu Fuzhou's death, Lin Qingyu recovered from his illness and returned to court. The ministers found that the prime minister, after his return, was not the same as before. In a word, the prime minister has become lazy.

Prime Minister Lin no longer worked from dawn til dusk, busying about on every task. Now, when it came to small matters, he allowed to cabinet to decide, only showing up when there were major issues. On the other hand, the emperor, after recovering from his soul-loss disease, under the tutelage of Guan Taifu, made rapid progress in his studies. After a little more than a year, he was no different from a normal prince. He appeared in Qinzheng Hall more and more frequently. He was also no longer dazed and sleepy in morning court. When the ministers had something to report, Prime Minister Lin would throw it to the emperor with a, "Your Majesty, what do you think?"

There were various indications that the emperor was not far from fully taking over the reins of government. Sure enough, it didn't take long before the cabinet's notes written in blue in the reports became the emperor's critiques written in red.

Since the emperor personally took charge, the officials rarely saw Lin Qingyu in the palace. If Lin Qingyu didn't come to the palace, the emperor had no choice but to go out of the palace to cling to him. The empress dowager

watched as her son ran out the palace day after day, causing rumors to fly everywhere. Unable to bear it, she called Lin Qingyu, asking, “Qingyu, why don’t you stay in the palace, just like before, in Xingqing Palace’s side hall?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Dare I ask the Empress Dowager, in what capacity should I stay in the palace?”

The empress dowager was at a loss for words, “This…”

“Before, the emperor was mentally incomplete, so this minister had no choice but to overstep the rules and act as an agent of the government. Now that His Majesty is fully in charge of the government, this minister is simply too young to serve as head of all these officials. It is a daunting task. I wish to express to Her Highness my intention to resign as prime minister. I ask that you choose another to take this post.”

The Empress Dowager had also noticed Lin Qingyu’s recent disinterest in government affairs. That he would choose to resign was not at all surprising

for her. She didn't immediately agree or disagree. Instead, she asked, "If you step down as prime minister, you will still stay in the capital, won't you?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I wish to travel the four corners in search of effective medicines."

"This is absolutely impossible!" The empress dowager turned anxious, "The emperor cannot be without you!"

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "That is His Majesty's business and not this minister's. If this minister insists on leaving, does the Empress Dowager intend to force me to stay?"

The empress dowager's eyes darkened. For her, nothing was more important than her son's body and mind. If Lin Qingyu insists on leaving then she will have no choice but to force him to stay.

But how could she force him to stay? Would she imprison him in the palace? No, Lin Qingyu has too much prestige in the army. Were she to do this, it would only create a rift between the emperor and his ministers.

The empress dowager was worried. She invited Jiang Xing to discuss the matter.

When Jiang Xing heard that Lin Qingyu was to leave, he said nervously,

“Mother, I can’t leave the prime minister’s side…”

The empress dowager held his hand and patted it. She said comfortingly, “Mother knows. Aren’t I helping you find a way through this problem?”

Jiang Xing thought for a while and said, “The prime minister said that him staying in the palace would be transgressing regulations, then let us find a proper and legitimate reason for him to stay here.”

The empress dowager said hesitantly, “Li’er, you…do you like the prime minister?”

Jiang Xing smiled, his brows and eyes curving, “I like him. I like him the most.”

The empress dowager gritted her teeth and throwing caution to the wind, said, “In our time, it is common for male servants and concubines to serve the Emperor. Even your own Imperial father had a few in his harem. Although I feel it a bit unfair to Wancheng and General Gu, but…”

Jiang Xing smiled slightly, “The prime minister cannot be a servant, nor can he be a male concubine. If this is how it is to be, he must be empress.”

The empress dowager’s eyes widened. “Empress?! Li’er, have you gone sick again!”

“Ordinary people can marry male wives so why can’t I have a male empress?” Jiang Xing smiled, “Did Mother forget. This is even an imperial edict you

asked of Father. If you hadn't forced the prime minister to marry my cousin as a male wife, would taking on male wives even be so accepted in the Dayu?"

Every word in the saying 'you reap what you sow' seemed to strike the empress dowager senseless. After a while, she said hurriedly, "The emperor is the ruler of our country. How can you compare yourself to ordinary people! Men can't have children. If the emperor were to have a male empress, there would be no legitimate son."

"I will have neither legitimate children nor illegitimate ones. Mother must already know. I am a cut sleeve and the kind that cannot bear to lay down with a woman." Jiang Xing said quietly, "Mother, my mind cannot stand so much stimulation. Do not force me."

Empress dowager: "…"

Jiang Xing put on a pitiful expression, as if to say, "If Mother disagrees, I'll get sick and show her!" The empress dowager felt very distressed. When the image of how her son looked when he lost his soul flashed in her mind, she threw all thoughts of reason and ethics to the back of her mind. She said worriedly, "Even if Aijia were to agree, how can those generals and officials accept it? How can the emperor block the mouths of all under heaven?"

Jiang Xing knew that with this the empress dowager was just about wrangled. He said with a smile, "The empress dowager need not worry about this. There are precedents for marrying widows in previous dynasties. There have even been some who snatched away their daughter in law to be their noble consort

and some who've made their father's concubine their empress. Compared to that, all I want is to marry my cousin's widow. This isn't such a big problem."

After Shen Huaishi considered it, he finally chose to stay in the capital. As His Majesty had said, it was his duty to recast the glory of the Heavenly Prison Sect. Lin Qingyu also said that he could go back to the Northwest at any time he wished.

Now, Shen Huaishi could freely enter and leave the palace and has become one of Jiang Xing's most trusted confidants. Jiang Xing even told Shen Huaishi his real name. But telling him was useless. Xu Junyuan will keep calling him "Jiang Gongzi" anyway and Shen Huaishi will only ever use honorific titles. If Jiang Xing wanted to hear someone call his name, he had to go to Lin Qingyu.

After Jiang Xing came to power, in order to solve the shortage of qualified officials, the lack of capable people, he opened an Enke to recruit scholars. After the end of the Enke, Jiang Xing held a large Qionglin banquet in the palace to entertain the new palace graduates. During the banquet where most of the guests were young talents, the top passers were seated closest to the emperor, with a clear view of the emperor's face.

For these young scholars, this was their first time entering the palace and they were all very cautious. They didn't dare to gawk or stare too openly. Only

when the emperor offered them wine, did they dare raise their eyes to look at His Majesty.

What they were met with was the sight of the young emperor wearing a luxurious black dragon robe; his handsomeness revealing the sharpness of a true monarch. He radiated a distinguished and accomplished air. He appeared candid, clear and bright. With just one glance, one had a clear sense of what it was to be "young" and what it was to be a "son of heaven".

And the Prime Minister, seated next to him, impressed upon them how a person can be both cold yet bright and colorful, charming yet dignified. The newly passed Young Master Tanhua was the most gifted scholar from the southern reaches. Though born with excellent looks, seeing these two people, he could not help but feel ashamed of his inferiority.

After three rounds of drinking, Li Chan's shoulders sank and it was the half-drunk Wu Guogong who put his arms around his shoulders, saying, "Chan ah, what do you think of Young Master Tanhua?"

Li Chan gave an objective appraisal, "A gallant young scholar, gifted with both talent and beauty."

"Heroes usually agree!" Wu Guogong patted Li Chan on the back in relief, making Li Chan almost spit out his food, "This lord has already investigated.

Young Master Tanhua is unmarried. Do you think he would make a good match for Prime Minister Lin?"

Li Chan said without hesitation, "Not good enough. Although Tanhua is good, in the days to come, he will join the Imperial Academy or the Imperial Censors and other such places to temper himself. Prime Minister Lin is the head of all ministers, how could the status of the two match?"

Knowing that it was time for him to lie again, Shen Huaishi interjected, "I heard that Prime Minister Lin intends to resign."

Li Chan resolutely said, "Regardless, he would still not be worthy."

Wu Zhan came to join in the fun. Hearing their conversation, he said, "Then how about Zhangyuan? Although he is not as good-looking as Tanhua, he is the champion after all."

Li Chan shook his head. "No, he cannot be."

Wu Zhan said in a rough voice, "Then you tell us who can. Who would be worthy?"

Li Chan was silent for a long time before uttering two words, "His Majesty."

They were all taken aback. Wu Zhan thought Li Chan was joking and said, laughing, "Although the emperor likes Prime Minister Lin, it is definitely not

the kind of love." After speaking, he thought of Lin Qingyu's face and turned uncertain, "Well, probably not. The emperor is still a child."

Li Chan said helplessly, "The emperor is already fully in charge. Why would he still be a child?" Li Chan looked up, "The emperor has grown up a long time ago."

Shen Huaishi pondered and said, "In terms of status, only the emperor is qualified to marry Prime Minister Lin. But the emperor's wife will be empress."

"So what if he'll be empress?" Wu Zhan raised an uproar, made courageous with drink, "Are you saying the person that General Gu valued most is not qualified to be empress?"

Shen Huaishi said, "General Wu, please watch your words. We are in the palace."

Jiang Xing watched from a distance as these people conversed together. He called over Xiao Songzi and whispered a few words. After the Qionglin

Banquet, Wu Zhan and the others were invited to Qinzheng Hall for an audience with the emperor.

Jiang Xing said, “I have something that I need to consult with you, my ministers.”

They said in unison, “This minister shall do his best to share the worries of His Majesty.”

Jiang Xing has always been curious about how these ministers managed to speak so neatly. “To tell you the truth, I wish to make Prime Minister Lin my empress.”

Shen Huaishi: …Finally.

Li Chan: … Sure enough.

Others: Ah! ! !

“I have already learned of General Gu’s last wish from Shen Huaishi. The General laid down his life for our country, he has rendered the greatest of contributions. How can I have the heart to allow him to die with a grievance?” Jiang Xing said with serious look in his eyes, “I am willing to care for Prime

Minister Lin in the General's stead. In this whole world, only Zhen can protect Prime Minister Lin for the rest of his life."

Wu Zhan was so moved that he almost cried. "Your Majesty, Your Majesty…"

Wu Guogong burst into tears. "Fuzhou must be looking over us. With this, he can rest easy in the nine springs."

Li Chan had mixed emotions but mostly of relief. Yes, only the son of heaven can protect Prime Minister Lin for a lifetime. He asked, "Dare I ask what His Majesty wishes us to do?"

Jiang Xing said, "The Prime Minister is a person who values love and righteousness. He must still be holding onto General Gu's memory. Zhen hopes that you can find a way to help me persuade Prime Minister Lin to agree to my marriage proposal."

With the arrival of summer, good news came from the Northwest. Wu Youyuan has led the Zhengxi Army deep into the hinterlands of the Xixia and they had broken through several cities. Xixia was forced to send envoys to sue for peace. Those who advocated for war and those who advocated for peace, raised an awful commotion about the matter. Prime Minister Lin happened to be in the Imperial Medical Office, overseeing the delivery of a nest of poisonous lizards with the genius doctor from the Southern border.

The poisonous lizard had laid five or six eggs and Lin Qingyu was burying them in the specially prepared gravel. He also fed the female lizard. After

finishing his work, Lin Qingyu washed his hands and put the wedding ring Jiang Xing had given him back on his finger.

Seeing this, the genius doctor said, “The Prime Minister puts on and takes off this ring more than a dozen times a day. Do you not find it troublesome?” The genius doctor had deep-set eyes and a very exotic face. He appeared to be a young man barely past twenty yet he could actually be as old as Lin Qingyu’s grandfather.

“It is a bit troublesome.” Lin Qingyu put the ring on his finger again, “But I am willing to go through this inconvenience.”

Lin Qingyu returned to the General’s Mansion and when he got off the carriage, he saw Shen Huaishi, Wu Zhan and the others standing in a row at

the door of his house. Each had on a different expression but they all appeared eager to have a try.

Lin Qingyu pretended not to understand and invited them into the mansion. He asked, “What is it?”

Wu Zhan has always been very straight to the point. He said directly, “Prime Minister, do you have any wish to remarry?”

“No.” Lin Qingyu’s brows were now tinged with anger, “What does General Wu mean by this? How long has it been since the General passed away and you’re already thinking of having me marry?”

“No, no, that isn’t my intention.” Wu Zhan said quickly, “But this is the General’s wish.”

Lin Qingyu was taken aback. “The General’s wish?”

Having forced to deceive people so many times, Shen Huaishi’s acting skills were forced to improve. “Prime Minister, it was General Gu’s stated wish while he lived that you be able to find another to form a relationship with; to find someone you can spend the rest of your life with hand in hand.”

Lin Qingyu was a little moved. “The General, did he really say that?”

“It is true.” Wu Guogong said solemnly, “To die with one’s eyes open is no laughing matter. Teacher Xu even came to tell us that those who do are made

into lonely ghosts unable to reincarnate."

Lin Qingyu said coolly, "That man purposely mystifies simple matters. Don't tell me you believe him too?"

Wu Zhan persuaded him earnestly, "Truth be told, the Emperor wishes to marry the prime minister. The Emperor is handsome and he has been clinging to you since he was a child. If you marry him, you will be the Empress of our country. This, this would not be a loss for you."

"His Majesty…?" Lin Qingyu's eyes went wide and his face changed suddenly, "Who taught the Emperor this? This is simply absurd."

Li Chan said, sounding him out, "Prime Minister Lin, I believe that His Majesty is sincere to you. You too must have some affection for the Emperor…"

Wu Zhan nodded again and again. "Yes, yes. Prime Minister, we know that you have no wish to remarry. But for the sake of the General, please think the matter over."

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes. After a long silence, he said reluctantly, "Since it is the General's last wish, I will consider it."

Chapter 119

Lin Qingyu considered this matter for several months. During this period of time, news that the emperor wanted to make Prime Minister Lin empress spread among the civil and military officials. Everyone's reaction was different but generally speaking, the military officials turned silent upon hearing it while the civil officials cried.

The military officials only knew that Prime Minister Lin was General Gu's widow and that he was about to remarry after being a widow for a year and a half. Oh, you say this is General Gu's own last wish? And that Prime Minister Lin also didn't want to remarry? Oh, that's all right then.

The civil servants wondered if the emperor's mental disease had relapsed, wanting to actually appoint a man as empress; and not just any man, but one who'd been widowed twice. But obviously, His Majesty wasn't insane, otherwise, how could he have made such a harsh and decisive judgement regarding the governor of Liang Zhou, Qian Xiyuan's corruption case? Not only did he have Qian Xiyuan beheaded but he also made an example of him,

ordering all officials above the fourth rank in the capital to go to the execution ground to watch the sentence being carried out.

So the problem must be Lin Qingyu. Relying on his appearance, it was not enough that this person seduced Gu Fuzhou back then, he even dared to covet the position of empress! Such outrageous behavior!

One courageous old minister forced his way into the General's Mansion, pointed his finger at Lin Qingyu and cursed at him. Unexpectedly, Lin Qingyu, instead of getting angry, smiled and invited the old man into the mansion. He served him tea and said: "To be honest, I do not wish to remarry. Unfortunately, going against an Imperial decree means death. Why don't you go and dissuade the emperor for me? "

The old minister: "…"

Therefore, a group of veteran minister came crying to Qinzheng Hall. "Your Majesty, you must not! A male wife goes against the natural order. A male

empress would bring disaster upon our country and the people! Insisting upon having your own way, you doom the Xiao family line!"

Jiang Xing raised his head from the mountain of scrolls and raised his eyebrows. "Are you done?"

The old minister was so agitated that his whole face went flushed. He added, "…You doom the country, the nation and its people!"

Jiang Xing didn't get angry. You could even say he was gentle and polite, "Once you've finished what you want to say, go back quickly. I'm busy."

The old minister shouted, voice now hoarse, "Your Majesty!"

Jiang Xing said again, "That Zhen will make Prime Minister Lin empress is not up for discussion with you. I am only informing you all. Come and have a drink with me when you have time."

The old minister covered his chest with his hand and almost vomited blood: "… Your Majesty!!!"

"Also, the Empress Dowager has already agreed to this matter. She is getting along in years. Do not bother her."

The old ministers: "…"

Wu Youyuan, far in the Northwest, learning of this, cut off the arm of the Xixia

prince to congratulate the empress. Back then, Gu Fuzhou had also been about his age when he took the life of Xixia's crown prince and made a name for himself on the battlefield.

——The young man's epic of youthful righteous ardor has just begun.

The Dayu's first male empress was also the first male empress in history. How exactly they were to form this marriage was a problem. The crowning of an empress was inherently complex and complicated. The officials of the Ministry of Rites had to formulate a new sequence of processes. This dragged on for another half year, until the old ministers couldn't help but feel numb to the matter. In the end, Lin Qingyu, who didn't really wish to remarry, was "forced" to nod in assent.

In the second year of the emperor's reign, the emperor wed his empress. It was announced to every corner of the nation and there was universal rejoicing.

Lin Qingyu once again put on a wedding dress for Jiang Xing. Counting the previous three times, this was the fourth time. Marrying the emperor was different from marrying any others. Jiang Xing knew that he didn't like complicated things, so he specially chose a simple and solemn wedding dress for him the last time they were married. But this time, he needed to wear the dress embroidered with the pair of phoenixes flying together. The Shangfu Bureau had spent half a year working on it. He had to don on his phoenix coronet specially fashioned for a man. On his forehead, a phoenix feather

huadian had to be painted. He must sit on a palanquin with eight carriers and be carried from the imperial palace's main gate to within the palace.

His crowning as empress was held in Hua'e Tower. It was held with great strength and impetus, displaying the bearing of royalty. The first snow had just melted, but the upper floor of Hua'e Tower was filled with flowers. But no matter how many flowers competed to be most beautiful, when the emperor and empress walk up the steps, hand in hand, everything was relegated to being the foil to set off their beauty.

Apart from the sound of the bead curtains clinking on the phoenix crown, Lin Qingyu could only hear the beating of his own heart. He stood beside Jiang Xing and held Jiang Xing's hand. He could feel Jiang Xing's hands damp with sweat.

…On the surface, he looked so calm and composed, with the bearing proper for a monarch of a country. So many people stared at Jiang Xing, looking at

him as though he were divinity. Only Lin Qingyu knew that Jiang Xing was still the same boy whose palms sweated when he was nervous.

Like this, he accompanied him, walking step by step to the highest spot.

Hundreds of officials paid homage. Heaven and earth celebrated together.

From this day on, winter had another meaning to Lin Qingyu.

It was night time. The flowers were beautiful, the moon was full and the happy evening was bitterly short.

No one dared to pour the emperor wine. Having learned from his past mistake, this time, Jiang Xing came to Fengyi Palace completely sober, not a drop of wine touched his lips. Lin Qingyu had already put on a bridal veil after the ceremony proclaiming him as empress. He was now sitting quietly on their bridal bed.

The empress' wedding dress was dignified and heavy. His body was covered tightly, only a pair of white jade-like hands were exposed; on his left ring finger was a ring engraved with a dragon pattern.

Jiang Xing breathed a sigh of relief. Lin Qingyu had been obsessed with cultivating Gu for many days. He'd been worried he would come in to see that

Lin Qingyu had sent away all the officials and was silently hatching poisonous lizard eggs.

So far so good.

He twisted the ring engraved with the phoenix feather around his finger. When the official reminded him that it was time to remove the bridal veil, he raised his hand. He was about to lift away the bridal veil when he suddenly stopped, as though he didn't want to disturb the beauty. The official called out again and only then did he regain his composure and he reached out his hand again.

The playful bridal veil was disturbed and a beautiful face like peaches and plums gradually appeared behind veil's tassels. They locked eyes, Jiang Xing was momentarily dazed, as though drunk. He was distracted by his bright eyes, dazzled by his beauty.

They've been married three times. They've dated for three years and they've shared the same bed three hundred and six times. But at this moment, Lin Qingyu still made his heart flutter, bashful and at a loss.

The official reminded him that it was time to drink the wine, but he gave no response. Lin Qingyu said, "You are all dismissed."

Hearing the sound of the door closing, Jiang Xing finally came back to his senses. Seeing Lin Qingyu's teasing expression, he immediately tried to regain

some dignity, putting on a look as though he had seen all to be seen. He said with a smile, “Beauty, you are my Laopo once again.”

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. The huadian on his forehead also moved slightly. “What does laopo mean in your hometown?”

“Didn’t I tell you?” Jiang Xing was a little surprised, “Laopo means wife.”

Lin Qingyu made the proper inferences. “Then that means, Laogong means husband.”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Exactly.”

Lin Qingyu nodded. He picked up the wine pot, poured two cups of wine and handed one of them to Jiang Xing. “Then, let’s share a drink, Laogong.”

Being called “Laogong” by this classical beauty in a wedding dress, Jiang Xing felt he must have already lived a full life. He took the wine cup and wrapping his left hand round Lin Qingyu’s right, drank the wine in one gulp.

Taking off the bridal veil, drinking wine together… they did everything a normal wedded couple should do, missing not a single step. After that, only consummating their marriage remained.

Jiang Xing was in no hurry. He wanted to admire this beauty in red for a little longer. He stood in front of Lin Qingyu, raised his chin with his hand, looked

at Lin Qingyu seriously, and suddenly sighed, “What I wouldn’t give for a camera right now.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “What is a camera?”

Jiang Xing sat down beside Lin Qingyu, and began to teach him the basic principles of a camera.

Lin Qingyu listened for a while then smiled lightly and said, “It’s our third wedding night, are you sure you want to be talking about this?”

“Weren’t you the one who asked?”

“You can tell me later.” Lin Qingyu said, “If we don’t do this now, it’s going to be dawn.”

Under the light of the red candles, Jiang Xing’s eyes were so very bright. “But Baobei’s so beautiful, I don’t know where to start.”

Lin Qingyu grabbed his hand and put it on a certain part of his body. With a slight smile on the corner of his lips, “From here.”

Jiang Xing’s breathing tightened. He said with a smile, “Then I shall listen to

my wife."

Jiang Xing pushed Lin Qingyu to fall back on the swath of red.

With the strong feeling of their deep love, they locked eyes on each other. Lin Qingyu tried to raise his hand to touch the corner of Jiang Xing's eye. "You look so good…"

"I look good?"

"En." Lin Qingyu said softly, "You on top of me, dripping with sweat, you look so good."

Jiang Xing paused for a moment, his eyes filled with emotions. His voice was so hoarse, he could barely speak, "You're going to be the death of me."

…

Waking up in the middle of the night, Lin Qingyu turned over. Before, he even opened his eyes, he heard a voice, "Qingyu, I'm here."

Lin Qingyu slowly opened his eyes. He didn't realize that there was no longer anyone beside him. He saw Jiang Xing sitting at the table and turned over a report in his hand. "Why did you wake up suddenly?"

Lin Qingyu blinked his eyes, making certain he hadn't seen wrong. "What are

you doing?"

Jiang Xing was full of resentment. "Reading these reports. I finally understand that my salted fish dreams went completely up in flames the moment I became emperor. From now on, I will be a donkey plodding forward with the country on my back."

Lin Qingyu: "…You might be donkey but there's no need for you to read reports on your wedding night, is there?"

"True." Jiang Xing said, pained, "But I was so nervous and anxious these past few days that I couldn't do anything. I've left a lot of things undone."

Lin Qingyu wondered, "Why were you nervous and anxious?"

Jiang Xing said calmly, "You make me nervous. I was going to marry you again."

Lin Qingyu laughed. "It's not the first time we've gotten married. There was nothing to be nervous about."

"Marrying you, no matter how many times I do it, I will definitely still be nervous. And this time, I was going to marry you with my own body, so of course the feeling is different."

Lin Qingyu's heart throbbed and his chest felt slightly hot. This person's casual words could so easily make him blush and his heart skip a beat, like a young

man discovering romance for the fist time. He was so capable.

“Then go ahead and finish those up. Once you’re done, come to bed.”

Jiang Xing sighed, “Alright. Go to sleep first, don’t wait up for me.”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t smell the other’s scent and feel the other’s warmth beside him. He still wasn’t used to it and so he asked, “Can you come and read those in bed?”

The corner of Jiang Xing’s lips ticked up. “If you want your husband to coax you to sleep, you can just say it.”

So Lin Qingyu said directly, “I want my husband to coax me to sleep.”

Jiang Xing went to bed with the scroll in his arms. Half lying down against the pillow, he took Lin Qingyu into his arms. “Go to sleep, Baobaei, we have to go to Ci’an Palace to pay our respects tomorrow morning.”

Lin Qingyu nodded, found a comfortable position in Jiang Xing’s arms and closed his eyes once again.

As the night darkened, Jiang Xing became more and more sleepy. He struggled to finish his reading. He then turned his head and saw the mountain of reports piled up beside him and couldn’t help feeling sad; he was still working

overtime on his wedding night. Even donkeys weren't put to work this hard — how did he fall to this level!?

The person in his arms moved slightly in his sleep. Jiang Xing looked down at him.

Lin Qingyu was pillowed against his abdomen, breathing lightly against his stomach; his long lashes casting shadows on his cheeks.

He quickly had an answer.

Because there was one thing that was more important than being salted fish.

His wish was for Lin Qingyu to be unrestrained, to be able to do what he wanted to do; even to be able to do bad things without the slightest scruple. He hoped that Lin Qingyu could freely pursue his ideals and live out the brightest and most dazzling existence.

He didn't want Lin Qingyu to be well-behaved and sensible. He didn't want Lin Qingyu to suppress himself for the so-called good of the country.

He wanted Lin Qingyu to be willful and happy forever.

For this reason, he was willing to be a salted fish that was not so idle.

II

Extras

123

Extra Story 1

Dayu's emperors didn't have a marriage leave and the day after his wedding, he already had to attend court. This was a rule set by his predecessors. Jiang Xing felt these rules were inhumane and had to be changed. But after thinking about it, he wasn't going to benefit from these changes; only future emperors would benefit. Forget it; if he had to suffer, he couldn't suffer alone.

After morning court finished, it was time for the cabinet members to discuss matters in Qinzheng Hall. Jiang Xing sat on the dragon throne, fighting back

his sleepiness as he listened to the ministers' reports on the unresolved matters that morning.

Li Chan said, "Your Majesty, Jizhou's governor, Xie Kejin is requesting for an increase in the soldiers' pay. How should we respond?"

Jiang Xing asked, "Why does he want to increase the soldiers' pay?"

"Xie Kejin says there are frequent changes in the Northern border and Jizhou has to recruit more soldiers and acquire more horses. They are taking precautions."

Jiang Xing said casually, "Does Xie Kejin mean to say that the King of the Northern border has plans to rebel once again?"

Li Chan said cautiously, "I dare not speak nonsense."

"The King of the Northern Border and Jingchun are living a lovey-dovey happy life in the North. He has no reason to rebel. And if they had wanted to rebel, they could have done so two years ago, taking advantage of when the court was preoccupied with the war with Xixia. Why would they wait until now?" Jiang Xing said, "What Zhen sees is Xie Kejin growing apprehensive because of Qian Xiyuan's fall. Taking warning from an overturned cart, he is made even more aware of the importance of money and food for soldiers and

horses and so he has the audacity to ask Zhen for more pay and provisions for soldiers."

In the Dayu, the governors were the managers of the provinces and its highest local official. Jizhou was foremost among the nine provinces. It bordered the north and occupied a vast territory. Xie Kejin had entrenched himself in Jizhou for many years, covering the sky with one hand, he had been assembling a personal army, leaving the court with no choice but to be on guard against him.

Li Chan asked, "Then Your Majesty means…to not give it?"

Jiang Xing thought for a while. Twirling a yet unstained brush in his hand, he said, "Xie Kejin might not actually be harboring any thoughts he shouldn't. This might simply be the grieving of a fox for the hare. He's just a little shaken. If we do not provide it, I'm afraid we might be beating the grass to scare the snake. If we wish for him to remain calm, we would still need to give something to him. However, Zhen has no intention of giving him everything he wants." Jiang Xing suddenly stopped twirling his brush. "Relay my order. The Ministry of War and the Ministry of Revenue are to discuss and come up with an appropriate amount. We cannot not give but we won't give all."

Li Chan said, "This minister hears Your Majesty's order."

After Li Chan retreated, Nan'an Hou stepped forward and said, "Your Majesty, there was a severe drought in Xuzhou last year and famine broke out as soon as winter came. Many of its people have been forced from their homes and

starved of food. Should we distribute grain and provisions as soon as possible to relieve the disaster?"

Jiang Xing frowned. "Send the aid. Also, Xuzhou is to be exempted from land tax for three years."

Then, an imperial censor came forward to present his complaint. "Your Majesty, the eldest son of the Minister of Rites was in a male brothel in the capital the day before yesterday. Driven by jealousy over one young man, he came to blows with the Wen Family's Ninth Young Master. Both come from wealthy prominent families, the sons of some of our highest officials. Unexpectedly doing such indecent and vulgar things, it sets an extremely bad example. I hope Your Majesty will punish them severely."

As the censor's complaint wasn't as important as the matters the other ministers presented, Jiang Xing took this time to do a bit of something else. He opened a blank scroll, wrote down the words "What are you doing, Baobei?"

and handed it to Xiao Songzi. Xiao Songzi tacitly understood and retreated with the scroll in his hands.

Jiang Xing asked the censor, “Who did you say was fighting?”

“The eldest son of the Minister of Rites and the Wen Family’s Ninth Young Master.”

Jiang Xing wondered, “These two have a good relationship, don’t they? I remember that they grew up together.”

The censor said solemnly, “The emperor is wise. Though they come from different families, they regard themselves as brothers. Turning against each other for a man? They spoke ill of each other, beat each other, punching and kicking. Beauty misleads, a blue face brings calamity. The words of our ancestors ring true.”

Jiang Xing yawned, pretending not to understand what the censor was implying, “Who struck first?”

The censor hesitated for a moment and said, “According to my investigation, it was Ninth Young Master Wen who threw the first punch. But Ninth Young Master Wen claims he didn’t hit the Minister of Rites’ eldest son very hard, a

touch that's all. But the Minister of Rites' son threw a very strong punch in return…"

Jiang Xing found it both infuriating and laughable. He suddenly felt like some kind of kindergarten teacher. "They haven't necessarily turned against each other. I think they're more like children throwing tantrums."

The imperial censor said, voice deep, "Your Majesty, these two are both over sixteen years old. They are no longer children! Does the Emperor mean to say they have committed no fault?"

Imperial censors have always been blunt and outspoken. Jiang Xing didn't become angry. He raised his hand and signaled the censor to calm down. "Why so anxious? Zhen didn't say they wouldn't be punished. However, neither of them hold any official position, so I can only punish their parents. The Minister of Rites and Wen Guogong have failed to properly teach their son and grandson. They will be fined for half a year and each will be fined one thousand teals of silver to fill the treasury."

After being so busy for a couple of hours, they finally finished discussing all matters that should be discussed. The rain in June, the wind in July… all these

good and beautiful things in the world couldn't compare to the words "this minister will now take his leave".

Except for his beautiful wife, of course.

As soon as the ministers retreated, Jiang Xing's dignified posture quickly collapsed and he slumped lazily on the dragon throne. He felt exhausted physically and mentally, more tired than after plowing three acres of land. Fortunately, Xiao Songzi had returned from Xingqing Palace with Lin Qingyu's reply.

After the emperor and empress are married, the empress should reside in Fengyi Palace. But Jiang Xing didn't want to live separately from Lin Qingyu so he had Lin Qingyu remain in Xingqing Palace. He even moved him into the main hall from the side hall. Not to mention in the imperial family, even in ordinary noble families, the master of house and the madam had their own residences. But the emperor and the empress lived together every day, like some commoner couple.

Lin Qingyu's reply to Jiang Xing was only three short words: [Hatching the egg.]

It turned out that he was looking after their eldest son or perhaps eldest daughter who was about to be born. No wonder he was so perfunctory in his

reply. Jiang Xing really wanted to go and watch Lin Qingyu hatch the egg but he still had a lot of reports he needed to read.

These reports, these evil reports, the eternal bane of his existence, the shackles of pain in his life.

Jiang Xing stared at the pile on his table and every part of his body resisted. “Forget it,” he gave up on himself, “I’ll sleep for a while and read them later.”

Xiao Songzi urged, “Your Majesty, if you delay until night again, the Empress will be unhappy.”

Jiang Xing hesitated and said, “Then I will read quietly after he falls asleep.”

Xiao Songzi, having gotten the empress’ instructions in advance, had no choice but to toughen his scalp and continue to urge, “Your Majesty, these reports

contain important matters selected by the cabinet. They really must not be put off."

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu came to the Qinzheng Hall and asked Xiao Songzi who was standing guard outside, "How is His Majesty?"

Xiao Songzi smiled bitterly, "The emperor…"

Seeing Xiao Songzi's expression, Lin Qingyu already had a guess. Walking into the inner hall, he saw Jiang Xing lying on the dragon desk. It looked as though he had already fallen asleep. He had his head pillowed on one arm, pressing against an open secret missive, brush still in hand.

Lin Qingyu pulled out the secret decree. This was a secret decree for Shen Huaishi. Jiang Xing was ordering the Heavenly Prison Sect to go to Jizhou to secretly observe the governor's movements. He also said that while he was

there, Shen Huaishi could go to the Northern Border to catch up with Jingchun.

When Jiang Xing wrote the latter part, his words were crooked and could barely be made out. This was enough to prove that he had held on until he simply couldn't and fell asleep.

Lin Qingyu took off the fox fur robe from his own shoulders and covered Jiang Xing.

Jiang Xing woke up slowly, his arm having gone numb. He opened his eyes and saw Lin Qingyu standing in front of the imperial desk, writing something with a brush. They had just been married, in order to display the majesty of the

imperial household, Lin Qingyu chose to wear splendidly decorated robes, extremely glamorous and luxurious.

Jiang Xing propped his head up with his hands, looked at Lin Qingyu with a smile and said after a while, “Is the Empress done hatching the egg? Is it a prince or a princess?”

Lin Qingyu glanced at him. “Hatching eggs isn’t that quick. It will take a few days for the little poisonous snake to break through its shell. Now that you’re up, go and move to the bed. Sleeping on your desk isn’t good for your health.”

“It’s fine.” Jiang Xing moved his shoulders a bit, “I’m used to sleeping like this — What are you reading?”

“The reports. I’ll handle the rest for you and you can go and rest.”

“Ah, this is embarrassing.” Jiang Xing sat on the dragon throne and borrowing strength from the desk, slid in front of Lin Qingyu with a slight push. The dragon chair in Qinzheng Hall had specially been remodeled by Jiang Xing. The four legs were installed with wheels, allowing him to slide around. He also

had it modified to allow for the height to be adjusted. “I just discovered something.”

Lin Qingyu said, “What?”

“Are you an imperial report?”

Standing, Lin Qingyu was much taller than Jiang Xing, Lin Qingyu said, looking condescendingly down at him, “What did you say?”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Because the more I look at you, the more I want to sleep.”

Lin Qingyu said, expression completely calm, “Well, maybe if you stop sleeping with me so much, you can have another hour of sleep every day that way you won’t fall asleep in Qinzheng Hall.”

Jiang Xing put on an expression as though he’d had a suddenly realization, “That makes sense. I’ll try it next time.”

Lin Qingyu paused, frowned and said, “But you can’t cut back too much…”

Jiang Xing found his wife cute that he couldn’t help but ask, “Qingyu, how about a kiss?”

Lin Qingyu’s heart trembled slightly. He lowered his eyes and said calmly,

“Kiss me if you want. Why do you have to spout so much nonsense?”

Jiang Xing laughed. He was too lazy to stand up, so he put his arms around Lin Qingyu’s waist and forcing him to bend down. He then raised his head and kissed him on his lips.

This kiss gave Jiang Xing a little more life.

After the kiss, Lin Qingyu found himself sitting on the others lap, with the other’s arms around him. His breathing had gone rough, his cheeks were flushed. The way he looked, like he was asking him to have a taste, completely blew away all Jiang Xing’s interest in handling proper work.

However, the eternal sorrow of the corporate drone was that even if the sky was afire, they had to finish work first.

Jiang Xing hugged Lin Qingyu from behind, resignedly picked up his brush and continued writing out the unfinished secret missive. Lin Qingyu recovered from the heat of passion and asked, “You’re letting Shen Huaishi visit the Northern Border. I suppose it isn’t simply to let him catch up with Jingchun.”

“I firmly believe that the King of the North has no intention to rebel. But just in case. After all, I can’t be taking the country as my plaything.” Jiang Xing

thought of something, “Speaking of which, I haven’t been out of the capital with you yet. Where do you want to go on our honeymoon, Baobei?”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Honeymoon? What’s that?”

Jiang Xing put down his pen and patiently explained to him the origins of the honeymoon.

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Extra Story 2

Lin Qingyu was very surprised when he learned what a “honeymoon” was. For Jiang Xing, who found even the distance from Xingqing Palace to Fengyi Palace too far, to actually invite him to go on a long trip together?

“Where do you want to go?” Jiang Xing ordered Xiao Songzi to unfold Dayu’s map and hang it on the wall. He put his hand on Lin Qingyu’s shoulder and said, “How about we go to the Southern Border?”

Lin Qingyu said, “I’ve been to all the places in the south.”

“Hmm… how about Xuzhou? It’s the rainy season so the small villages there

would be very charming."

"I've been there too."

Jiang Xing had a bad feeling. "Then let's go north?"

"When I was sixteen, I stayed in the north for half a year with several fellow apprentices."

Jiang Xing was in a complicated mood. "You've been everywhere and you went to all these places with people that aren't me."

"A man aspires to travel far and make one's mark. And you like to nest in one place." As Lin Qingyu said it, a trace of doubt appeared on his brows. That's right, in the past, he traveled around the world with his mentor, doing good for society and saving people. But now he didn't have much interest in going anywhere, he just wanted to stay at home with Jiang Xing.

Lin Qingyu glanced at Jiang Xing. "I blame you. You've made me lazy."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Is it all my fault?"

"We can't go on like this, Jiang Xing." Lin Qingyu said, speaking from his heart, "While we're still young, we must learn as much as we can and do all that we

can. Staying all day in the palace, engrossed in romance; what kind of life is that?"

Jiang Xing disagreed, "We don't do it the entire day. We have a lot of work to handle. Besides, only young people can engross themselves in romance. When we're old, we wouldn't be able to even if we want to."

Lin Qingyu said, half-truthfully, "Don't worry, when you're old, you're still going to be able to engross yourself in romance. I just need to apply acupuncture."

Jiang Xing was very excited. But how could there be such a good thing? There must be a price to pay. In the end, his desire to live prevailed, "No, I want to keep living a few more years."

The two discussed for a long time, but they couldn't come to a conclusion. Instead, the topic strayed further and further away. Hua Lu came in to serve them fresh fruit, "Your Majesties, this is the pear sent from Qingzhou."

After Lin Qingyu remarried for the third time, this time to the emperor, Hua Lu voluntarily entered the palace and was now the maid in charge of Xingqing Palace. Both she and Huan Tong thought that Lin Qingyu had been forced into this marriage and she entered the palace to continue serving Lin Qingyu. Huan Tong wanted to enter the palace to continue serving him as well but according to the rules, he had to cleanse himself and Lin Qingyu could not bear to let

that happen to him. And so he left him in the General's Mansion to learn how to manage a household from Yuan Yin.

Jiang Xing casually took a pear from the basket and tossed it up and down for fun. "Since you've visited all the places worth visiting in the Dayu, why don't we let chance decide where we go for our honeymoon?"

Lin Qingyu said, "You mean, draw lots?"

"Sort of." Jiang Xing ordered Hua Lu, "Hua Lu, fetch me a dagger and a wide ribbon."

Hua Lu brought what Jiang Xing asked for. Jiang Xing said, "Qingyu, close your eyes and throw the dagger at the map. We'll go wherever it hits."

Oh, so they could also do it like this. Lin Qingyu found it a little novel and asked, "What if it turns out to be too far from the capital?"

It was not actually uncommon for the emperor to travel far away. Emperor Yuwen went to the south seven times. It was not impossible for Jiang Xing to leave the capital for several months, leaving the cabinet to take charge of the government. But if he stays away from the capital for too long, something

unforeseen might happen. The Dayu's territory was vast. Going from the southernmost point to the northernmost point could have several years.

Jiang Xing said, "Then we'll just choose somewhere else."

Jiang Xing blindfolded Lin Qingyu with red silk ribbon, leaving half of the bridge of his nose. His reddish lips slightly parted due to the sudden darkness, giving him an ambiguous and obscene air. Just looking at him was getting Jiang Xing hot under the collar. Thinking of how Lin Qingyu was cold and

reserved in front of outsiders, yet gorgeous and blooming when under his body, he couldn't help but bow his head and plant a kiss on the beauty's lips.

Hua Lu was stunned for a moment but Xiao Songzi pulled at the hem of her clothes. She then turned around and retreated, pretending that she hadn't seen anything.

Underneath the silk blindfold, Lin Qingyu's long lashes moved. "Why are you suddenly kissing me again for no reason?"

Jiang Xing just laughed. "I often kiss you for no reason. Haven't you gotten used to it yet?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while. "That's true."

Jiang Xing held the dagger and helped Lin Qingyu wrap his hand around the handle. "Throw it."

He threw the dagger and after hearing it hit, Lin Qingyu took off the silk blindfold and saw where the dagger struck. "Jiaozhou?"

Jiaozhou was located in the south of the Dayu. It was surrounded by mountains and forests and was close to the sea. It was humid and a place with heavy miasma, making it unsuitable for long-term residence. A few years ago,

after Shen Huaishi's attempted assassination of Xiao Cheng, he lived in Nanyue in Jiaozhou for a time to hide from the Tianji Camp."

Jiang Xing said with great interest, "What a coincidence. Actually, you could say that Jiaozhou is my hometown."

Lin Qingyu was a bit surprised. "Really?" He always thought that Jiang Xing's hometown was in another world, a place that couldn't be found in the Dayu's territory.

"Yes. But in our place, 'Jiaozhou' is not called 'Jiaozhou'."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What's it called then?"

Jiang Xing recalled his poor knowledge of geography, "Jiaozhou in my hometown is referred to as Guangdong, Guangxi, and Northern and Central Vietnam. Among them, I was born in Guangdong and moved to Jiangnan with

my parents when I was young. In the Dayu, it's called Yuzhou. Then I returned to Guangzhou in Guangdong after finishing high school."

"Guangdong, Guangzhou." Lin Qingyu remembered these words in his heart, "I didn't expect you to be born in such a remote and desolate place."

"Remote? Desolate?" Jiang Xing asked incredulously, "What about Guangzhou is remote and desolate…?"

Before Jiang Xing had time to defend his hometown, Shen Huaishi came in. He came to bid farewell to the empress. In two days, he will be leaving for the north.

"Huaishi, you came at a good time." Lin Qingyu said, "You have been in Nanyue. You tell the emperor whether Jiaozhou is a remote and desolate place or not."

Shen Huaishi looked at Jiang Xing. "Your Majesty, Jiaozhou is vast and sparsely populated. Most of the common people live among the high mountains and live by hunting and gathering. It is a whole world of difference between the capital, Jiangnan and other places."

Jiang Xing choked and said, "Fine, Jiaozhou might be a bit barren now, but in a hundred, no, a thousand years, it will be one of the most affluent places in the country." Jiang Xing pointed to Jiaozhou on the map, "Look Baobei, Jiaozhou

faces the Southern Sea and borders several neighboring countries. Once a port is opened…"

Shen Huaishi almost choked at hearing the word "Baobei". Now he really truly believed that the empress considered him a good friend. Otherwise the emperor wouldn't tell him his true identity, nor would he be not treated like an outsider in the slightest.

It was not surprising that the emperor would call Lin Qingyu "Baobei". The strange thing was that Lin Qingyu could accept it so calmly, without feeling awkward at all. If other people, ignorant of his true identity, coveted his beauty and called him "Baobei", he would probably feed them to the princes and princesses.

Jiang Xing has always been generous and easy-mannered, but now talking about his hometown, he was filled with nostalgia and he couldn't help feeling sentimental. "I haven't spoken the dialect of my hometown for five or six years.

I'm afraid I might have forgotten how to speak it. Huaishi, how do they call beauties in Nanyue? Do they use 'liangzai' and 'liangnu'?

Shen Huaishi told him very seriously, "No."

"Then what words do they use?"

Shen Huaishi uttered two strange sounding words. Jiang Xing didn't understand at all. He shrugged and said, "Fine."

Lin Qingyu pondered, "I'd like to see your hometown."

He was filled with yearning for the world where Jiang Xing grew up in. He wanted to know what kind of mountains and rivers could raise a person like Jiang Xing.

Jiang Xing hesitated and said, "But Jiaozhou is too far away from the capital." No matter what Jiaozhou will look like in a thousand years, the current Jiaozhou truly was too remote. Ministers who committed crimes were often exiled there.

Lin Qingyu said regretfully, "Indeed."

At this time, a servant from Ci'an Palace arrived, inviting Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu to the evening meal. Jiang Xing said, "Qingyu, you go ahead. Don't

keep the empress dowager waiting for too long. I'll go after I have a talk with Huaishi."

Lin Qingyu nodded and said, "Alright."

Lin Qingyu walked out of Xingqing Palace, and noticed Hua Lu's distraught appearance: "Hua Lu."

Hua Lu came back to her senses. "What is the Empress' instructions?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Do you find it strange that I am so close to the emperor? Are you wondering if I've completely forgotten about Young Master Hou and General Gu?"

Hua Lu lowered her head. "This servant dares not."

Lin Qingyu could see through to Hua Lu's thoughts. On the one hand, she felt that her master wasn't a heartless and ungrateful person. But on the other hand, she could see how he and the emperor held the tray to eyebrow level.

She was even more confused and puzzled than when he married Gu Fuzhou back then.

Lin Qingyu intended to tell her the truth and said slowly, “Don’t you think that the emperor’s temperament is very similar to Young Master Hou’s and General Gu’s?”

Hua Lu’s eyes widened in astonishment. “Thi-This servant now knows!”

Lin Qingyu asked, “You know?”

Hua Lu lowered her voice, “The Young Master is treating the emperor as a substitute for the Young Master and the General?!”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

Hua Lu looked worriedly towards the hall, “Young Master, does the emperor know about this?”

Lin Qingyu chuckled and said, “He knows and he is happy to be this substitute.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t have to wait long in Ci’an Palace before Jiang Xing arrived and the two of them had dinner with the empress dowager. They were served an extremely delicious dish of steamed fish. Jiang Xing knew that Lin Qingyu

preferred light flavors; he was sure to like it. He chose the tenderest part of the fish and removed the bones before putting it in Lin Qingyu's bowl.

"Thank you, Your Majesty." Lin Qingyu took some fresh spring bamboo shoots and placed it in his bowl in return, "These bamboo shoots are plump and tender. Your Majesty should give them a try them."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Thanks for your consideration, Empress."

The empress dowager looked as the two kept exchanging gifts. A strange feeling rose in her heart. To love one's wife was a good thing but the emperor was being too polite and attentive to the empress. The two were both men and those who didn't know would think the empress was the emperor's husband.

After dinner, the Empress Dowager said, "Empress, please go on ahead. Aijia would like to say a few words to the Emperor."

Lin Qingyu glanced at Jiang Xing. He gave a salute and said, "Then Chen will be taking his leave."

After Lin Qingyu left, the Empress Dowager said to Jiang Xing, all earnest words and sincere wishes. "Your Majesty, you are the emperor and the empress is your subject. Courtesy between a monarch and his subject is greater than that between husband and wife. The three cardinal principles and five virtues

govern human relations and is the natural order of things. Do you understand what your Mother is saying?"

Jiang Xing smiled faintly, "I understand."

The empress dowager was a woman of her time. That she thinks this way was normal. There was no use arguing with her; it would just be a waste of words. He agreed with his words but shall persist in doing it again the next time.

When Jiang Xing returned to Xingqing Palace, Lin Qingyu asked him, "What did the Empress Dowager say to you?"

Jiang Xing told him the truth. "She is upset that I deboned the fish for you. She implied that I should maintain my dignity as the emperor in front of you."

Lin Qingyu said, "Then what does the emperor think? Does this mean you won't be deboning my fish for me anymore?"

"How is that possible?" Jiang Xing said seriously, "You and I are both men. It could be said that you are my wife but then it could also be said that I am your wife. Since this is the case, of course, I will give you equal and respectful love."

… Lin Qingyu couldn't make up his mind, wondering whether he should be moved or not. He knew Jiang Xing too well. Generally, when he said words to move him, Jiang Xing would follow it up with something to spoil the mood.

Sure enough, before he could respond, Jiang Xing added, "It's a pity the

empress dowager would never understand. I didn't bother trying to persuade her. How about this, I will teach you to speak my native dialect and we can speak Cantonese in front of her in the future. It'll be a secret conversation." Jiang Xing was eager to give it a try, "How about it, isn't it interesting?"

Lin Qingyu: "…Heh."

In the end, they decided to travel to the South. It just so happened that the taxation reform in Jiangnan was in full swing. They could observe the peoples' sentiments while they were there.

Lin Qingyu wanted the Ministry of Rites to handle the emperor's trip but Jiang Xing stopped him. "A honeymoon is spent by the couple together. If we bring a large group, it won't be a honeymoon, it'll be a group tour."

Having said that, as the rulers of a dynasty, they had to have guards and servants in the palace, let alone when they travel far away. Jiang Xing also knew that traveling alone with Lin Qingyu was unrealistic. The Dayu was no better than his hometown, when going on a trip there were many complicated

things to prepare. He didn't know how much to bring and his carriage driving skills were average.

In the end, the two decided to take Xiao Songzi, Hua Lu and some the best shadow guards from the Heavenly Prison Sect. They then headed all the way to the South.

The author has something to say: I can't wait to write them in the modern setting!

For example, Qingyu transmigrates to modern times and dates Jiang Xing, who's still a high school student.

One day, Jiang Xing told him excitedly: Qingyu, I'm now eighteen years old!

Qingyu: … Again?

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Extra Story 3

March in Yangchun was filled with apricot blossoms and spring showers, peach blossoms and swaying willows. It was a good time to be traveling to the south of the country. Their group had two carriages; one for Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing and the other for the servants to take turns to rest. The shadow guards looking after the safety of the emperor and empress followed them in the dark.

Just traveling from the capital to the Southern regions takes a lot of time. The carriage needed not only to be comfortable but also had to have some entertainment to relieve boredom. Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing's carriage was extremely spacious, big enough for two grown men to fully lie down. The inside was covered with cushions. It was outfitted with a teapoy with some

fruit and preserves to satisfy their food cravings and also a small sized bookcase with paper and brushes, some medical books and novels.

Lin Qingyu wanted to pass the time by reading, but Jiang Xing insisted on teaching him to speak Cantonese and wouldn't let him off.

He had a highly retentive memory and instantly remembered things he's seen, the same went for things he's heard. While they were in the palace, Jiang Xing had taught him to read and write the characters of his hometown. With the Dayu's characters as foundation, he easily mastered simplified characters. During their usual days, when the two of them would chat with Xiao Songzi, Jiang Xing, hating anything troublesome, would fall back on using simplified characters. Thus, even Xiao Songzi had learned to understand simplified characters. Now, Lin Qingyu spent a little time learning Jiang Xing's native

dialect and by the time the carriage arrived at Yuzhang, he was able to have a simple conversation with Jiang Xing in Cantonese.

“Qingyu, say that again, the one I taught you just now.”

Lin Qingyu said unhurriedly, “I heckin’ luv ya?”

Jiang Xing was amazed. “You’re so talented.” There was nothing awkward about his accent. One who didn’t know otherwise would think that Lin Qingyu was born and bred in Jiaozhou.

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “His Majesty must have misspoken. The world is so vast, is there anything I do not have the talent for?”

Jiang Xing gave a thumbs up. “Damn it, you almost had me there. If you go to my hometown and take the college entrance examinations—the college entrance examinations is kind of like the imperial examinations, you would most definitely take top spot.”

Lin Qingyu said modestly, “This insignificant skill of mine is nothing to speak of.”

“Then, I have to play a song for you.” Jiang Xing picked up the Xiqin beside him, “The title of this song is: Lonely is the Unmatched.”

Having had his fill of playing around, Jiang Xing started to feel sleepy. Lin Qingyu generously lent him his lap as a pillow. When Jiang Xing woke up, it

was already dusk. Lin Qingyu maintained the same sitting posture as when he had fallen asleep, with a chess piece between his fingers, playing one man chess. The glow of the setting sun sprinkled over Lin Qingyu's shoulders, making his face seem aglow. Even his hair seemed to take on the golden hue of the setting sun.

Probably in order to fit with the beautiful spring scenery, Lin Qingyu wore a sky blue corseted robe today. With eyes lowered, lost in thought, he looked like a naturally carved jade porcelain figure.

Jiang Xing spent a long while simply appreciating the sight of him. His heart seemed to have been ignited by the setting sun. Lin Qingyu noticed his rapid breathing and looked at him. "You're awake?"

"En."

Lin Qingyu touched Jiang Xing's cheek with the back of his hand. "Are you thirsty?"

Jiang Xing grabbed his wrist. Eyes twinkling, he said quietly, "Qingyu, I kind of want to…"

The two had been married for a long time and they shared a deep mutual understanding. With just one look from Jiang Xing, Lin Qingyu knew what he was thinking.

Lin Qingyu could vaguely hear the conversation between Xiao Songzi and Hua

Lu outside. The look in his eyes was clear. “Don’t even think about it — We’re in a carriage.”

Jiang Xing just laughed. “Don’t be like that. I can’t even think about it? I’m not going to do anything.”

Lin Qingyu sneered. “You want to use your imagination to bed me again?”

“Oh, that’s right. If you hadn’t mentioned it, I would have forgotten that I still have this skill.” Jiang Xing put his hands behind his head, imagining, “Just listen, there’s a rustling sound. It’s me lifting the hem of your clothes.

Immediately, you feel a slight chill. My hand has reached in and is pressing against your soft spot. Our lips meet and my palm starts rubbing slowly…"

Lin Qingyu supported his forehead. "His Majesty is so talented. That you didn't turn your considerable talents to writing romance novels is a true loss for this world."

Jiang Xing's lips curved into a smile and he said, "Then have you cum yet?"

Lin Qingyu was very supportive. "Three times already."

Jiang Xing said boldly, "Well, I've already cum five times."

Lin Qingyu: "…" He'll remember to increase the number next time.

When they first arrived in Yuzhang, the two spent the day walking around the city for a day with Xiao Songzi and Hua Lu. Although the markets in the South weren't as lively and bustling as those in the capital, they also had their own charms. The willow trees swayed with the wind and the calls of the vendors had a soft tone unique to the Southern dialect. The way the women dressed too was slightly different from what was worn in the capital. In their hands, they held fans made of light gauze, creating a graceful and subdued style.

Both Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing were dressed like ordinary rich young masters. Lin Qingyu was more like the son of a scholarly family, wearing a long blue robe that attracted the attention of many people. On the other hand, Jiang Xing, holding a jade fan, appeared like an elegant young man with a free

and easy manner. He asked Lin Qingyu, “Qingyu, is there any place you want to go?”

Lin Qingyu said, “The largest pharmacy in Yuzhang is called ‘Xuanhu Tang’. It’s known as the Imperial Medical Office of the South. I’d like to go and have a look.”

“Alright. Xiao Songzi, go ask for directions to Xuanhu Tang —— Xiao Songzi?”

When he didn’t get a response, Jiang Xing turned around to look for him, only to find that Xiao Songzi had been distracted by a shop called “Liu Ziang Zhai”. “What is it? Do you want to buy cosmetics?”

Only then did Xiao Songzi come back to his senses and hurriedly said, “Replying to the Young Master, this servant wishes to bring back some local product as a gift to my younger sister.”

Hua Lu asked curiously, “Is there any difference between Yuzhang’s rouge and the capital’s?”

Lin Qingyu said, “If you want to find out then go in and have a look.”

Xiao Songzi was overwhelmed by favor from his master, “No, no. How can we can possibly delay the Young Masters’ matter for mine?”

Lin Qingyu said, “This is a leisure trip. There is no hurry for any matter. Go

on, go in."

The boss of Liu Xiang Zhai was used to talking human when talking to humans and talking ghost when talking to ghosts. As soon as she saw Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing, she knew that these two must be giants among men so she hurriedly greeted them with a smile. "Esteemed Sirs, are you interested in buying some rouge and powders? Then you came to the right place. In the whole of Yuzhang Liu Xiang Zhai's cosmetics are the best. Even the nobles in the capital who've used it swear by it."

Jiang Xing pointed with his jade fan to Xiao Songzi. "We're not the ones looking to buy. Rather, it's this little brother who's interested. You should address him. Don't mind us."

The boss looked at Xiao Songzi, blatantly sizing him up. The smile on her face faded a bit. "What would you like to buy, little brother?"

Xiao Songzi didn't know anything about women's cosmetics. He scratched his head, and said, "I have ten pieces of silver. What can I buy?"

As the eunuch personally serving the emperor, Xiao Songzi had quite a lot of savings. But when all was said and done, he was a child from a poor family and being frugal has been his habit since he was a child. For him, spending ten pieces of silver on a rouge was already a splurge.

When the boss heard him say this, she immediately knew that he knew nothing about this trade. "Ten pieces of silver won't buy you anything good,"

the boss said. “Better to add three more and that should be just enough to buy you Liu Xiang Zhai’s signature powder.”

Xiao Songzi appeared embarrassed. “I left the rest of my silver in the carriage.”

Lin Qingyu was about to pay the extra silver for Xiao Songzi but was stopped by Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing looked at the boss, raised his eyebrows and said, “What good rouge can’t be bought with ten pieces of silver?”

The boss begun to have misgivings. This young man in his brocade robe was obviously a nobleman. What did he know of the price of rouge and powders? “Yes,” the boss toughened her scalp. “I wouldn’t lie to you. You get what you pay for. The goods here in Liu Xiang Zhai simply cannot be compared to those used by those cheap wretches on the street.”

When Jiang Xing entered this shop, he noticed that there was another cosmetics shop right across called “Yu Fang Zhai”. He smiled and said, “Since you didn’t bring enough money, we’ll just have to come next time.”

The boss hurriedly tried to persuade them to stay, but the customers left so decisively that she could only watch helplessly as they went to the opposite shop. She and the boss of the shop across have been rivals for more than a

decade. Seeing the other make money pained her more than losing money herself.

Xiao Songzi said, “Young Master, I won’t buy it anymore. We should go to Xuanhu Tang first after all.”

Jiang Xing said, “We’re already here. It would be a pity not to buy.”

“But I don’t have enough money.”

“Don’t listen to her nonsense. How could ten pieces of silver not be enough to buy good rouge?” Jiang Xingyu put away his fan and beckoned, “Come here, I will teach you how to do it.”

Jiang Xing whispered a few words to Xiao Songzi. “Go ahead, we’ll wait for you outside. While you’re at it, help me buy a box of rouge — the best one they’ve got.”

Lin Qingyu asked suspiciously, “What are you up to?”

Jiang Xing was the very face of innocence. “Why, I’m buying it to give to Xiu Jiao momo when we get back.”

Xiao Songzi entered Yu Fang Zhai alone and said to the proprietress who came up to him, “The boss of Liu Xiang Zhai opposite said that you can’t buy any

good rouge for less than ten pieces of silver. If you don't agree, let's argue."

The proprietress' mood soured upon hearing this and said with a sneer, "That ignorant fool. She's an utter embarrassment to Yuzhang. — Don't worry, young sir. Forget ten pieces of silver, even three pieces is enough to buy you the best rouge and powders in Yuzhang."

After Xiao Songzi returned from Yu Fang Zhai loaded with cosmetic purchases, they continued walking in the direction of Xuanhu Tang. Yuzhang was a land of esteemed scholars and many of those who topped the Dayu's imperial examinations came from here. Bookstores lines the street, specializing in poetry collections and treasured scrolls of calligraphy and paintings.

Jiang Xing had no interest in calligraphy scrolls. If he wanted, he could have the world's most talented scholars write for him every day. He randomly picked some books to pass the time on their journey and asked Xiao Songzi and Hua Lu to take them back to the inn where they were staying the night.

Lin Qingyu spent a long time in the Xuanhu Tang, conversing with the doctor in charge and the errand boy who was in charge of collecting medicinal herbs for them. He also talked with the man who sold their medicine and while he was there, he even dispensed medicine for a patient suffering from a cough. He claimed to be a student of the Imperial Medical Office, here in Yuzhang to study. Most of the Dayu's doctors aspired to join the Imperial Medical Office

and he being such a beautiful doctor, who would dare to slight him? Who could have the heart to slight him?

They walked around the city almost the entire day and when they returned to the inn that night, not to mention Jiang Xing, even Lin Qingyu felt a little tired. After washing up, the two of them went to bed, fully clothed, without the energy to even consider doing a bit of lovemaking.

Early the next morning, Jiang Xing, as was his habit, turned to hug the beauty when he was unexpectedly met with thin air.

“Qingyu?” Jiang Xing opened one eye and saw Lin Qingyu sitting in front of the mirror with his hair tied back. He opened the other eye. “What are you doing?”

“Today I plan to go up Kuangsu Mountain.” Lin Qingyu said, “The herb collector in Xuanhu Tang said that there are many medicinal herbs unique to

Yuzhang deep in the forests of Mt. Kuangsu. I'm going to try my luck. Maybe there'll be a pleasant surprise waiting for me."

Jiang Xing couldn't believe it. "So, we're going out today?"

Lin Qingyu asked strangely, "Otherwise?"

Jiang Xing's voice went weak, "I thought we could rest at the inn today."

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. "We're here to travel. If you want to just rest in the inn, why'd you even come out? Wouldn't it have been better to rest in the palace?"

Jiang Xing had no way to refute. He fell back down and laughed. "Yesterday we walked at least 20,000 steps. My legs were about to break. Today you want me to climb a mountain. You're out for my life, aren't you? The honeymoon I

imagined is the kind where we walk at most 10,000 steps as you and I stroll along the beach."

Lin Qingyu ruthlessly shattered his beautiful fantasy. "There is no sea in the South."

Jiang Xing looked wretched. "Along the lake is fine too. I'm not asking for much."

Lin Qingyu sighed. "Then how about you stay in the inn to rest?"

Jiang Xing frowned. "But, I want to stay with you."

Seeing Jiang Xing so conflicted, Lin Qingyu too began to feel conflicted too. Of course, he wanted to stay with Jiang Xing as well. But Jiang Xing looked so much like a dead fish, tired and paralyzed, like his legs would break if he

walked a few more steps. It would be too cruel to make Jiang Xing come with him up the mountain to collect herbs.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and testing it out, said, “I also want to stay with my Lao Gong.”

Jiang Xing: “…”

Lin Qingyu pretended not to know what effect this had on Jiang Xing. “What kind of expression is that?”

Jiang Xing’s Adam’s apple bobbed. He said, “That’s not fair.”

The corners of Lin Qingyu’s lips ticked up and he asked, “Does Lao Gong have the strength to walk now?”

Jiang Xing assessed the strength he had in him and said in resignation, “It seems I have.”

The author has something to say: Do you think there would be something exciting when you saw ” Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing’s carriage was extremely spacious, big enough for two grown men to fully lie down. The inside was covered with cushions”?

——I wasn’t thinking anything! ! ! (dog head)

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Extra Story 4

After they finished dressing, Hua Lu and Xiao Songzi brought in their breakfast. The breakfast in the South was considerably light: small wontons with thin skin and tender stuffing, fluffy rice balls and sweet bean curd with brown sugar syrup. Although they could also eat these in the palace and the

ones the palace made were a lot more refined, the ones served in the inn had a lot more local flavor.

Hua Lu seemed not to have slept well last night and she couldn't stop yawning. Seeing this, Jiang Xing asked, "Were the beds in the inn uncomfortable?"

Hua Lu hurriedly knelt down and said, "This servant has been disrespectful in front of their Majesties. I ask that you forgive me."

"We're all on vacation. It's fine to not be as formal as we are in the palace." Lin Qingyu said, "Just treat us as young masters from an ordinary family"

Xiao Songzi couldn't help laughing. "Young Master, Hua Lu was reading a novel late into the night and that's why she probably didn't get enough sleep."

Hua Lu, pale faced, said anxiously, "Eunuch Song!"

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Why? Was the novel really that interesting? How about you let me have a read?"

Hua Lu blushed, "Replying to the Young Master, this servant was reading "The Story of King Ding's Pampered Wife"."

Hearing the title, Jiang Xing laughed out loud. "Hua Lu is now at the age when

she's gotten an interest in romance novels!"

Lin Qingyu asked, "Where did you get this kind of book?"

Hua Lu whispered, "Replying to Shaojun, it's one of the novels Young Master bought yesterday."

Lin Qingyu looked at Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing put on a look of innocence. "I just grabbed books at random. How could I have known there was such a book in there?"

Lin Qingyu exposed him, "Then why do I distinctly remember that you have an interest in these kind of books?"

Jiang Xing refused to admit it. "How could that be possible? I'm not Hua Lu."

Lin Qingyu hit the nail on the head. "Then why have you read "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch"?"

Jiang Xing: "…"

After breakfast, their group set off for Kuangsu Mountain. At the foot of the mountain, the carriage couldn't go any further so they could only go on foot. There were many rivers, streams and waterfalls in Kuangsu Mountain, which was famous all over the world for both its peril and grandeur. The mountain

was densely forested and shrouded in clouds and mists. When ordinary people entered the mountains, they could easily lose their way.

When Xuanhu Tang learned that Lin Qingyu was going to go deep into the mountain, they introduced him to a mountain villager to serve as his guide. This villager had grown up in Kuangsu Mountain and he was very familiar with the mountain terrain. Although he was already sixty years old, he was still healthy and strong. His temperament though was a bit eccentric. After walking for two hours, the villager still walked as though he were flying, like path before them was flat ground.

Lin Qingyu walked in front, chatting with the villager about the rare and exotic herbs in Kuangsu Mountain. He heard Jiang Xing say, "Qingyu, we have been walking for a couple of hours, let's rest."

Lin Qingyu turned to look at Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing's breathing was steady and he seemed fine. He probably just wanted to be lazy. "I have a few places to go to before dark. Time is tight and we can't delay." Lin Qingyu whispered, "Why don't you have the shadow guard appear and carry you up?"

Jiang Xing smiled bitterly and said, "Forget it, I can't afford to lose face with them."

The village man glanced at Jiang Xing, shook his head and continued walking on. The closer they got to the top of the mountain, the colder it became. Not long after, it began to rain lightly. It is rainy in spring and Xiao Songzi came

prepared with enough rain gear. Jiang Xing took an umbrella and said, “Shaojun and I shall share one. Xiao Songzi, you take care of Hua Lu.”

At this time, Jiang Xing was still able to keep up with Lin Qingyu and the villager. Ever since entering the mountain, Lin Qingyu has been wholly focused on his medicinal herbs. But now that he was under the same umbrella with Jiang Xing, he became a little dazed.

The spring rain pattered against the umbrella and wet the ground. The smell of wet earth filled his nostrils but still, he could smell Jiang Xing’s fresh, natural, warm and lazy scent.

The mountains were made deep green in the rain. It dampened their clothes. Ignoring the difficult mountain road, it was a scene of elegance.

After walking for an hour more, there came the sound of rushing water in front of them. They saw a waterfall cascading down thousands of feet,

splashing water at its foot. The broken cliff face, like a natural screen, blocked the spray.

Xiao Songzi was met head-on with this sight and he exclaimed, “It’s so beautiful!”

Jiang Xing said, “Flying curtains are like a jade screen; a sea of stars in the nine heavens.” It turns out that the ancient poems hadn’t been exaggerated.

The villager squinted his eyes to look at the opposite cliff and suddenly shouted, “Glazed Grass.”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes lit up. “Where?”

The villager raised his hand: “There, on the cliff opposite.”

In the rain and fog, it was difficult to see. Lin Qingyu took a few steps forward, almost reaching the edge of the cliff. Finally, he saw a solitary tuft of grass growing on the cliff face. Lin Qingyu said softly “It really is Glazed Grass.”

Jiang Xing took Lin Qingyu’s hand and asked, “What is Glazed Grass?”

Lin Qingyu explained to him, “It’s an herb unique to Kuangsu Mountain. It prefers a humid environment. It usually grows on cliffs and near waterfalls. It

is extremely precious. It is used as medicine in its dried state and has a miraculous effect on heart palpitations."

"Extremely precious? How precious is that?

Lin Qingyu's voice went slightly cold, "Even in the Imperial Medical Office in the capital, there are only two specimens and they had been requested by King Heng last year."

The villager snorted and said, "You are quite lucky to come across Glazed Grass your first time here. The last time I saw it was two years ago."

Jiang Xingyuan looked at the small spot on the cliff and asked, "Qingyu, do you really want it?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "I really want it. It's just that Glazed Grass grows on the cliff faces, so picking it is very difficult. And it's even raining."

Jiang Xing said with a smile. "So what? If the Madam wishes it, I will go up a mountain of swords and into a sea of fire. I will get it for you even at the risk of my own life."

Lin Qingyu's heart sank and he said coldly, "You just shut up."

Hua Lu remembered the scene she had read last night in "The Story of King Ding's Pampered Wife". King Ding and Queen Ding went for a spring outing in the mountains together. Queen Ding praised the wild flowers blooming on the

cliff and King Ding rushed to get it for her. While picking it, he slipped, almost losing his life. The queen's face turned pale and she cried, like a pear blossom made wet with rain. King Ding gently wiped away his wife's tears and said affectionately, "So long as the queen wants it, even the stars in the sky, this king will get it all for you."

Such deep affection moved her to her very core. Unexpectedly, the emperor regarded the empress like King Ding regarded his queen. No wonder he would willingly act as a substitute for the other two men. It wasn't an easy feat for the ruler of a country to reach this stage.

Just as Hua Lu was being moved, the emperor's tone changed: "– Do you think I would say that?"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Hua Lu: "???"

Jiang Xing estimated the height and distance of the cliff and concluded that the risk was too high. It was true that he could have the shadow guard give it a try

but the rain made everything slippery and even with Shen Huaishi's skill, they wouldn't be assured of success. The life of a shadow guard was also a life.

Good medicine was precious but life was even more so. Jiang Xing coaxed, "Listen, Baobei. This is too dangerous, we don't want it."

Hua Lu froze.

Lin Qingyu smiled. "Alright, we don't want it."

The villager's face turned ugly. "Are you sure you don't want it? The picking period for Glazed Grass is only a few days. If you miss it today, it'll be gone the next time. Do you know how much gold a tuft of Glazed Grass can sell for?"

According to the rules of the trade, he as their guide would be entitled to a portion of the sale.

Jiang Xing said, “We are not short of money.”

The villager asked anxiously, “Why are young people so afraid of death?”

When Xiao Songzi heard this, his face changed suddenly, “Presumptuous! Do you know who you are talking to!”

Jiang Xing stopped Xiao Songzi and smiled casually: “Calm down, the old man is right. I really am afraid of death.”

The villager stomped his foot. “If you don’t want it, I want it!” He said and turned around, going off to find someone to help him.

Jiang Xing said lightly, “I advise you to think twice.”

Lin Qingyu smiled silently. He knew that Jiang Xing wasn’t afraid of death.

When Jiang Xing was still Lu Wancheng, he took the matter of his life and death very lightly. During the first half of the year, he had almost no desire to live. Later, when he had something to concern himself over and a person he

cared about, he didn't hesitate to use strong medicine to fight poison with poison, just to live a few more months.

Afterwards, he experienced death as Gu Fuzhou and now he cherished his life more than even before. Even if there was only a little risk, he will not try it.

It was a good thing for Jiang Xing to be afraid, so that he wouldn't put himself in danger. He hoped that Jiang Xing would always cherish his life and be afraid of death forever.

Although he had missed out on the Glazed Grass, Lin Qingyu still gained a lot of other herbs. As they were going down the mountain, their basket was packed full. The next day, Lin Qingyu heard from the staff of Xuanhu Tang that by the time the villager who was their guide found helpers and reentered the mountain, the Glazed Grass had withered due to the rain. The villager went ballistic on the spot and fell ill after returning home.

Lin Qingyu felt quite sorry for him but didn't think much about it. For the next few days, he continued to visit famous doctors in Yuzhang and benefited a lot. Jiang Xing summoned the prefect of Yuzhang to inquire about the taxation reform.

The group stayed in Yuzhang for five days, after which they continued their way south. It was a day's journey from Yuzhang to their next stop. In the carriage, Lin Qingyu flipped through a book "Kuangsu Medicinal Herbs", comparing the medicinal herbs recorded in the book with those he had seen.

When he turned to the page that recorded the Glazed Grass, Lin Qingyu paused, remembering the rare grass that he had missed.

When he turned to the next page. A tuft of Glazed Grass, dried out in the sun, appeared in front of his eyes.

Lin Qingyu was slightly taken aback and then he looked at Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing was slumped on the bed, holding “The Story of King Ding’s Pampered Wife” reading it with gusto. Sensing Lin Qingyu’s gaze, Jiang Xing raised his head and asked knowingly, “What’s the matter?”

“How did you get it?” The one on the cliff had obviously withered, so where did the one Jiang Xing gave him come from?

Jiang Xing tilted his head to look at him and smiled. “What are you talking about, Baobei? I don’t understand.”

…

Lin Qingyu realized that Jiang Xing seemed to like creating all kinds of small surprises for him in the course of their everyday lives.

Like that engagement ring he thought he would have to wait for half a month to receive; slipping it onto his finger the next day; like the Glazed Grass that he

thought had no chance of getting suddenly appearing unexpectedly in front of him.

It was obviously just a trivial matter but it always made him feel very, very good.

He really liked Jiang Xing very much. What a privilege it was to be able to spend the rest of his life with such an interesting soul.

Lin Qingyu's chest turned hot and his body heated up along with it. He stopped talking nonsense, pushed open the window of the carriage and called, "Xiao Songzi."

Xiao Songzi said, "Empress?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Find a place with no one around and stop the carriage. Have everyone—including the shadow guards who are secretly guarding the carriage, fall back half a mile."

Xiao Songzi felt that the empress' order was strange but didn't dare think too much about it. He hurried off to prepare. Jiang Xing turned thoughtful and said slowly, "Qingyu, you don't mean to…"

Lin Qingyu laughed lightly, "Just doing it in your thoughts is too boring."

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Extra Story 5

The horses for the emperor's use were all very well-trained. No matter what happens inside the carriage, the imperial horse would simply stands in place, grazing leisurely.

Jiang Xing paused suddenly and took out a box of rouge from out of nowhere. Lin Qingyu opened his lips slightly. Through a haze, he saw Jiang Xing dip his fingertip into the gorgeous rouge and then smear it on his lips.

Jiang Xing was inexperienced and didn't apply it well enough. The rouge was faintly smeared on the corners of Lin Qingyu's mouth, making him appear not drunk but tipsy, bright and affectionate.

Jiang Xing stared unmoving at him for a long time. Lin Qingyu called out, dazed, "Jiang Xing…?"

Jiang Xing hugged him, almost like a sigh, "Qingyu, how did you grow up like

this? Do you know how gorgeous you are?"

As he said that, as if he could no longer control himself, he closed his eyes and kissed Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu still kept his eyes open. Leaning his back against the bookshelf on the carriage, he was almost hanging on Jiang Xing's body. He saw sweat drip onto Jiang Xing's drooping lashes.

When they parted, Jiang Xing also had a touch of rouge on his lips. Coupled with his passionate eyes, it was even more moving than when he first saw him.

Lin Qingyu raised his hand and stroked the corner of Jiang Xing's mouth. He said, voice hoarse, "Then, why aren't you continuing?"

Xiao Songzi and the others were waiting half a mile away from the carriage. By the time they were called back by the emperor, it was already dark. "Build that fire, boil some hot water and let's cook something to eat." Jiang Xing told him, "We'll sleep outside the city tonight."

Xiao Songzi said, "Your Majesty, even though the carriage is big, it definitely won't be comfortable enough to sleep on. If we hurry, we can reach the city and spend the night there."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "You don't understand. We're doing this for fun."

When the hot water was ready, Jiang Xing personally carried it back to the carriage. With the few rabbits the shadow guards hunted and the dry

preserved food and seasonings they'd brought with them, they all had more than enough to eat for dinner.

After the rabbit was roasted, Jiang Xing helped Lin Qingyu off the carriage. The empress was the very picture of calm and composure, even if he did smell like another man.

The rabbit they roasted simply over an open fire, of course, wasn't good as the one cooked in the palace, but Lin Qingyu thought it still tasted good. It seemed

he was really hungry. Suddenly, a black shadow flashed in front of Lin Qingyu's eyes. It was the shadow guard who'd been secretly guarding them.

Shadow guards can only show up when their master is in danger. Jiang Xing asked, "What happened?"

Holding something in his hand, the shadow guard knelt in front of the empress and said, "Replying to their Majesties, there was a snake entangled in a tree just now."

With the light of the fire, Lin Qingyu saw the snake in the shadow guard's hand clearly. He said, "It's cute."

The shadow guard was taken aback, wondering if he should be gentle with this little snake.

"Unfortunately, it's not poisonous." Lin Qingyu was silent for a moment, "Your Majesty, I miss the little poisonous snake."

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows. "Then should we head back to the palace now?"

Lin Qingyu calmly said, "If that's the case, then having fun is still more important."

Jiang Xing couldn't help teasing, "What a cruel imperial mother and father. For

the sake of having fun, they completely neglected their children."

Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing spent the entire spring in the south, after which, they went to the summer palace to escape the heat of summer. When they returned to the palace, it was almost autumn. What awaited Jiang Xing was a mountain of official documents. How much fun he had at the beginning was how miserable he cried afterwards. This autumn and winter, Jiang Xing never slept for more than three hours. After making it to the New Year when he could set aside state affairs for a while, a bunch of family affairs popped up.

The kings of the various fiefs were returning to the capital one after another to celebrate the New Year. There were endless family banquets in the palace. Fortunately, the empress dowager was around to help orchestrate these events and Jiang Xing didn't have to bother too much. He just had to bring his wife to put on a show at the banquet itself.

In the past, the concubines would enter the palace to pay their respects to the empress dowager and the empress. This year, the empress was a man and the rules have changed. Empress Lin had no interest in seeing them, so he spared them the trouble of having to come. The only ones who were allowed to enter the palace to pay respects to Empress Lin was the Lin family.

Lin Qinghe has grown into a young boy. Although not as beautiful as his elder brother, everyone could tell that he will be a handsome man in the future. Lin Qinghe wasn't as interested in medicine as his father and brother and he will be taking the imperial examination in the future to pursue his career as an official. He was currently studying away from home and the number of times

he got to visit in a year could be counted on one hand. Since it was so rare for Lin Qingyu to see his younger brother, he got to stay in the palace for a few days.

On the day of the Lantern Festival, Lin Qingyu was supposed to be in charge of the festivities, but his little poisonous snake had eaten something and had been listless since last night, curled up in a ball and shivering. Lin Qingyu felt distressed and stayed by the little poisonous snake's side to take good care of it.

This was a small snake from the Western Regions. Its body was light blue with eyes bright red like agate. It was said that it could only survive in the environment of the Western Regions. Lin Qingyu managed to find a nest of snake eggs and successfully hatched three of them. Only this little snake grew up to adulthood. Jiang Xing had even named him Jiang Xiao Lin.

Lin Qingyu tried to feed the little snake a special decoction. After drinking the medicine, the little snake finally got back some of its appetite. It stuck out its tongue and slithered slowly towards the fresh bullfrog beside it. Seeing this, Lin Qingyu was slightly relieved. At this time, Hua Lu came in to report, "Empress, the Second Young Master and Prince Yi are here."

King Yi was Jiang Xing's most insignificant cousin with a fief so far away from the capital that he could only return to the capital once every three to five years. Not long after his father died of illness, being that he was the only son, the title automatically fell to him. King Yi's son, named Xiao Zhuo, was only

five or six years old and it was his first time coming to the palace with his father.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Why is Prince Yi and Qinghe together?”

Hua Lu replied with a smile. “Second Young Master ran into the prince by chance in the imperial garden. Seeing that he was lively and cute, he took him to play together.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Have them wait for me in the main hall.”

Lin Qingyu settled the little poisonous snake and went to the main hall. He saw Lin Qinghe holding Xiao Zhuo’s hand as Xiao Zhuo looked around curiously, his pair of big eyes looking extremely lively.

When Lin Qinghe saw Lin Qingyu, he let go of his hand and said, “Qinghe gives his greeting to elder brother.”

Xiao Zhuo followed suit and knelt down, “This humble servant, Xiao Zhuo greets the Empress.” Though only five or six-year-old, he already spoke quite

eloquently and his demeanor as he knelt and saluted wasn't any less dignified that that of an adult man.

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. "Qinghe, what are you doing in Xingqing Palace? You should take your friend somewhere else more fun to play."

Lin Qinghe smiled and said, "Replying to elder brother, he heard from me that elder brother is raising a blue snake and he pestered me to let him take a look."

Lin Qingyu was slightly surprised. "You're not afraid of snakes?"

Xiao Zhuo smiled, his brows and eyes curving, "Replying to the Empress, I'm not scared. Snakes are so cute."

Lin Qingyu smiled lightly. "Then, follow me."

No matter how adept the little poisonous snake seemed at reading humans' actions, Lin Qingyu would never let a child get close to it. Xiao Zhuo simply looked at it from a distance, his little face flushed with excitement. He kept exclaiming, "It's so cute and pretty." Lin Qinghe by one side, patiently told Xiao

Zhuo all about the little snake. “It’s native to the Western Regions, which is very far away from the capital. We’ve named him Jiang Xiao Lin.”

Xiao Zhuo was confused. “Ah, why is it surnamed Jiang?”

Lin Qinghe was stumped by this question. “This… I don’t know either.”

Lin Qingyu looked thoughtfully at the two young boys, one big and one small. A thought inadvertently sprouted in his heart.

Lin Qingyu joined Lin Qinghe and Xiao Zhuo for some snacks in Xingqing Palace. Not long after, Xiao Songzi came to remind him that it was time to prepare for the family banquet and lantern festival.

It was another year of the Lantern Festival, with thousands of lights, trees looking as if afire and flowers shining silver. Dressed in fine clothes, the emperor and the empress climbed up the tower, standing atop the highest point of the capital, overlooking the city that never sleeps.

The empress dowager was getting old, so after only a short time spent admiring the scenery, she returned to Ci’an Palace. Once she was gone, the remaining insignificant people were not worthy of the attention of the

emperor and empress. Lin Qingyu casually cut a paper lantern and said, “Your Majesty, have you ever thought about adopting children?”

Jiang Xing said, “Since you brought it up, does the empress have someone in mind?”

“Not really.” Lin Qingyu said, “But I think we can put some thought into this matter.”

Jiang Xing said with a smile, “It’s possible. But there’s no need to rush, there will be much time in the future.”

Lin Qingyu smiled. In the distance, dots of bright light gradually rose into the

sky, brightening up the entire night sky.

They had much time in the future. This moment was perfect just as it was.

“Jiang Xing.”

“En?”

Lin Qingyu’s eyes were alight. “Happy fourth anniversary.”

Jiang Xing was slightly taken aback and he stared at Lin Qingyu’s side profile.

The night was as day and this beauty was as jade.

“Happy fourth anniversary.” Jiang Xing raised the corner of his lips, “Please continue to take care of me in the coming year. At this time next year, you will love me more than you do now, alright?”

Love him more? But he already loved him so much.

Lin Qingyu said, “That depends on your performance.”

Jiang Xing smiled lightly. “Then I will work hard.”

The author has something to say: This story ends here, and the timeline will not be lengthened, because I want the salted fish and the beauty to stay in their

best years, to indulge always in love — the forever eighteen-year-old Classmate Jiang! (Voice Hoarse)

Next are the extras set in modern times! =3=

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Extra Story 6

Lin Qingyu slowly took a deep breath and forced himself to calm down.

This all started when Xu Junyuan claimed to have obtained a mystical stone from the peak of Kunlun Mountain. This stone was filled with the aura of heaven and earth. It was entirely green like an emerald. He divided the strange stone into two, making a pair of pendants, and presented it to the emperor and empress on the emperor's Longevity Day.

Xu Junyuan was a strange person and Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing knew to treat with caution any gifts he presents to them. Following his instructions, the two placed the pendants under their pillow and went to sleep. Who would have ever thought that he would find the world turned upside down upon waking up?

Lin Qingyu found himself standing in a surging crowd. It was as crowded as the Dayu's Lantern Festival. But these people were obviously not from the

Dayu. Their mouths and noses were covered with cloth. Some of them were wearing thin and strange clothes, somewhat similar to what Jiang Xing had been wearing the two times he'd entered his dreams. While some were dressed in something similar to what they wore in the Dayu, long corseted robes. It was why Lin Qingyu, in his Dayu attire, didn't appear so conspicuous.

——Oh, how could he not be conspicuous?

He had just stood there for a short while and already onlookers had surrounded him. These people were looking unabashedly at him. Some held up rectangular objects, while others pointed something cylindrical at him. He knew that the rectangular object must be a mobile phone and this cylinder

must be the camera that Jiang Xing had told him about. They were taking pictures of him.

… When he returns to the Dayu, he was going to have their little poisonous snake deliver his thanks to Xu Junyuan for his generous gift.

Lin Qingyu appeared calm on the surface but a trace of confusion and fear rose in his heart. His fear wasn't because he suddenly found himself in a strange place but because Jiang Xing was not by his side.

If the strange stone Xu Junyuan had given them was what had caused him to come to this foreign land, then Jiang Xing should have come with him. But where was Jiang Xing?

Lin Qingyu raised his head and saw a huge banners hanging on the ceiling. The characters on the banners were simplified characters that Jiang Xing had taught him. It read "Guangzhou Hanfu Carnival".

Guangzhou was equivalent to the Dayu's Jiaozhou and was Jiang Xing's hometown. Jiang Xing must also be in this city.

He must be here — he better not dare not be here!

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and pondered. The passers-by who took pictures of him were all calling out, "Hey, kiddo, look this way please. — Look at the

camera. Thank you!”

“Hey Handsome, where did you get your hanfu? Can you send me the link to their store?”

“Xiao gege, can I add you on WeChat? I’ll send you the picture after I finish editing it~”

…

Lin Qingyu kept on a cold expression and said nothing. He didn’t mean to turn a deaf ear but he really didn’t know how to respond. He decided to first leave this crowded place and find somewhere quiet to think about what to do next.

While repeatedly saying ‘excuse me’ to the onlookers, he made his way to the side. The place he was in was huge, not any smaller than Xingqing Palace. Even after walking for so long, he still hadn’t reached the end. He found that as soon as he stopped, people would immediately turn to watch him. As he walked, many people took out their mobile phones to take pictures of him and call out to him but at least, he wasn’t as flustered as before.

Jiang Xing once said that if he ever found himself in his hometown, he could be found using a mobile phone. The most urgent task was to find someone to borrow a mobile phone from to call Jiang Xing. According to his observation,

everyone in Jiang Xing's hometown has a mobile phone so it shouldn't be difficult to borrow one.

"Excuse me–"

An excited voice came from behind him. Lin Qingyu turned around and met a pair of big doe-like eyes. It was a girl about his age, with something called a [work permit] hanging around her neck, on which her name was written. The girl's surname is Ke, and her name was Ke Tang.

Ke Tang said, "Xiao gege, it's best to wear a mask when you're not taking pictures."

Ke Tang lived up to her name; her voice was very sweet. Lin Qingyu said, "A mask?"

"Yeah, although there's no epidemic in Guangzhou at this time, we can't take it lightly."

"I don't have a mask."

"Then I'll give you one." Ke Tang took out a mask and handed it to Lin Qingyu. Before Lin Qingyu put it on, she said quietly, "Wait a minute, xiao gege, can I take a photo with you?"

As a staff member of the Hanfu Carvinal, it wasn't quite appropriate for her to be doing this. But this xiao gege was just so good-looking that she couldn't

help it.

Lin Qingyu didn't respond.

Ke Tang was a little embarrassed but she didn't blame Lin Qingyu at all. Was it impolite for a beauty to ignore others? She simply wasn't worthy in the first place!

"It's okay if it's not!" Ke Tang hurriedly said, "Excuse me!"

Lin Qingyu smiled, "I didn't say no. Please."

Ke Tang was dazed by this unexpected turn and hurriedly took out her mobile phone. She didn't dare to stand too close to the beauty, for fear of messing up the expensive clothes he had on him.

The xiao gege was a head taller than her, about 1.8 meters tall, which was passable in the south. Ke Tang raised her phone up, made a 'v' sign at the camera and took the picture. Because she was a little flustered, she forgot to turn on the beauty filter. Facts have proved that a true beauty could stand the

test of the front camera. A casual photo was better than the any that she'd refined for five hundred years.

Lin Qingyu asked. "Are you done taking the picture?"

"I-I'm done." Ke Tang smiled brightly, "Thank you, xiao gege!"

"You're welcome." Lin Qingyu put on the mask and revealed his real purpose, "I also have a request. Can I borrow your mobile phone?"

"Huh? My phone?"

Lin Qingyu explained, "I'd like to use it to find someone, but I don't have a mobile phone myself."

Ke Tang thought that Lin Qingyu simply hadn't brought his mobile phone with him. After all, his fancy clothes didn't seem to have any pockets to store a phone. Ke Tang generously handed her phone. "Here you go."

Lin Qingyu stared at the phone, but didn't take it. Jiang Xing had told him a lot about mobile phones when he was bored and had nothing to do. He knew

many of its uses, but without the real thing in the Dayu, no matter how much he knew about it, he couldn't use it.

"Can you make this call for me?" Lin Qingyu asked.

"Of course." Ke Tang was very enthusiastic, "What's the phone number?"

Neither he nor Jiang Xing thought that they would one day actually return to Jiang Xing's hometown. That matter about making a phone call was simply

said casually. Fortunately, he had an excellent memory and he memorized the string of numbers after only listening to it once.

Ke Tang dialed out the number Lin Qingyu recited and before it rang, she asked, “Xiao gege, who are you trying to call?”

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, “My husband.”

Ke Tang stared at him wide-eyed, almost dropping her phone: “…Ah?!”

When Jiang Xing woke up, he found himself lying on the sofa. The air conditioner was whistling, a thin blanket was covering his body and his mobile phone lay quietly beside him.

Jiang Xing slowly sat up and looked at the time. It was already late in the afternoon. He started sleeping after lunch and he’d only slept for five hours in total but felt like he’d slept for a long, long time and had a long, long dream.

The side effect of his nap was that everything looked wrong. There was this feeling of vicissitudes, as if everything seemed a lifetime away.

Jiang Xing sat on the sofa in a daze. There was the sound of footsteps coming down on the stairs. A girl wearing a pure white dress and light makeup appeared. It was his cousin, Pei Zhiqi, who was one year older than him.

Seeing Jiang Xing’s distraught look, Pei Zhiqi asked, “What’s the matter with

you?"

Jiang Xing said slowly, "I feel like I've just had a very long dream. I dreamt that I died and lived again and that I lived and died again. It was so painful. I also… dreamt of a classical beauty in a wedding dress."

"A beauty? How beautiful?"

Jiang Xing tried his best to recall but got nothing. "Fuck, I can't remember."

Pei Zhiqi didn't take it seriously. "That's just how dreams are. You forget about them when you wake up."

Jiang Xing hesitated for a while and then said, "You're right." He gave up trying to remember and lay back down on the sofa.

"Stop sleeping, you've been sleeping all afternoon." Pei Zhiqi said, dumbfounded, "Are you really going to sleep away the first day of the National Day holiday?"

"Actually, not just the first day. I plan to spend the next six days like this." Jiang Xing turned on his phone, clicked on the reading app and continued to read the novel he hadn't finished.

Pei Zhiqi caught a glimpse of his screen and said in surprise, "You're really

reading “Huai’s Refusal of the Monarch!”

“Weren’t you the one who recommended it to me?

Pei Zhiqi smiled slyly. “Yes, yes. So, what do you think of the plot?”

“It’s hard to say. What’s keeping me going is my desire to see how Xiao Cheng dies. I wanna see Doctor Lin kill everyone.”

“Doctor Lin? You mean Lin Qingyu. Do you like him?”

Jiang Xing said without hesitation, “I like him.”

“But he’s not a good person. He killed a lot of people for revenge.”

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows. “And it just so happens that I like watching him take revenge and kill people. I declare that from today onwards, I will be Doctor Lin’s loyal supporter.”

Pei Zhiqi had on a complicated expression. “Then I advise you that you push a bit more, in case the house collapses…”

Jiang Xing sensed something was wrong. “What do you mean? What happens to my great beauty?”

“Pretend like I said nothing.” Pei Zhiqi said guiltily, “Read for yourself and find out.” After saying so, she took an orange from the coffee table and headed

upstairs.

Half an hour later, Pei Zhiqi went downstairs again, holding a mobile phone in her hand. “The Hanfu Carnival is on the hot search, it seems that there’s a store with a super handsome model…” She zoomed in on the photo, squinting her eyes to spot any flaws. “Is it really possible for someone to be this handsome?”

Jiang Xing whispered, “He died.”

Pei Zhiqi was taken aback. She didn’t immediately realize what he was talking about. “Who? Who died?”

Jiang Xing chuckled. He rubbed his eyes that had been staring at the phone for a long time and said, “So boring.”

Pei Zhiqi saw that his screen was at that scene of Lin Qingyu committing suicide in the Eastern Palace. She suddenly realized and empathized with him. She expressed her deep sympathy. She sat down next to her younger cousin and comforted him, “Don’t think about it too much. He’s just a fictional character. Once you go offline, you should tell your grievances to fuck off.

Come on, lao di. Get on your account. I've recently been practicing my jungler. Take me flying. "

Jiang Xing: "…"

"Ah, I forgot! You haven't turned eighteen yet. You can only play for an hour at night during the holidays! How miserable."

Jiang Xing silently opened the game and successfully logged in. Pei Zhiqi was dumbfounded. "How'd you do that?"

Jiang Xing said, "I used Auntie's ID card. And by auntie, I mean your mom."

The two entered the game and were engaged in a team battle when a phone call came. The caller ID was an unfamiliar number and the area was in

Guangzhou. There was a high probability that it was a sales call so Jiang Xing swiped his finger over the screen, refusing the call.

'Toot–'

Ke Tang blinked and told Lin Qingyu, "Your husband hung up the phone."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "What do you mean by hung up?"

Ke Tang said, "It means that he didn't want to answer the call."

Lin Qingyu's eyes turned cold and he said coldly, "Why?"

"Must be because he saw an unfamiliar number and didn't want to answer it. I would do the same." Ke Tang said, "How about I send him a message?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Alright, thank you."

Ke Tang typed out the message, checked it with Lin Qingyu and sent it after confirming that there was no problem: [Hello, I am an enthusiastic passer-by. Your wife is lost, without a mobile phone and he's asking you to pick him up~]

Lin Qingyu and Ke Tang waited fifteen minutes for Jiang Xing's reply:

[?]

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Extra Story 7

Usually whenever he received similar scam messages, Jiang Xing wouldn't even take a second look. Him replying with a [?] was already giving the scammer a lot of face. The main reason was that the scammer didn't ask him to send money; they didn't say that his wife was hit by a car and was now in the

hospital and in urgent need of money. This could simply be a case of mistaken identity, so he considered this '?' reminder as his good deed for the day.

The other party quickly replied to him: [Are you Jiang Xing?]

Very well; the possibility of it just being sent to the wrong number was ruled out. This was a fraudulent message and the scammer had even obtained his information in some way.

Jiang Xing: [I am your father.]

Ke Tang held her mobile phone as if she were holding a hot potato. She glanced at Lin Qingyu and saw that his face had turned cold, his eyes flashing daggers. It made her think they ought to turn up the air conditioner in the stadium.

"Xiao gege, did you remember the number wrong?"

Lin Qingyu sneered. "I didn't remember it wrong." This kind of reply that sounded like the person who sent it was asking for a beating; he was sure that it came from Jiang Xing. He could bet Xu Junyuan's life on it.

Ke Tang's big eyes were full of question marks. "Ah? Then why is he like this?"

Lin Qingyu shook his head. He didn't know either. Jiang Xing should have realized he was missing. He should be trying his best to find him, just like he

was. After receiving such a message, he should be flying over. How dare he reply to him with a [?]!

Ke Tang tentatively asked, “Xiao gege, are you okay?” She felt that she had solved the case. The young couple must have quarreled and were in the middle of a cold war. The beauty condescended to step down for his husband and asked him to pick him up. But his husband believed they were still trading vicious words and was pretending to be some cold-fucking scumbag, leaving him to fend for himself.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, “As I remember, mobile phones can send photos?”

Jiang Xing thought that saying “I am your father” would be enough to shut up this scammer. He didn’t expect him to become more courageous as his frustrations mounted. He even sent over a photo of his “wife”.

Jiang Xing clicked on it thoughtlessly. A young man in ancient Chinese clothes appeared on his phone screen.

Jiang Xing was stunned.

The fancy clothes they young man had on did not belong to any particular dynasty in their history, yet he found it very familiar. What made him even

more stunned was that the young man seemed unreal, as though it'd been taken out of some CGI game.

But this face brought with it such a strong sense of familiarity. When he saw it, his heart unexpectedly raced to 180 beats per minute.

He didn't wonder even wonder why this swindler was sending him the picture of a man. With that kind of face, a man or a woman, he was the wife everyone

dreamt of. Being a swindler nowadays wasn't easy. With Photoshop skills like this, he ought to be able to open up a treasure store.

Stranger: [Your wife looks like this, are you really not going to come and pick him up???]

From the three consecutive question marks, Jiang Xing got a vague image of the swindler gnashing his teeth in exasperation and jealousy.

You liar, how'd you get so dramatic?

Jiang Xing: [You went overboard with the Photoshop, xiongdi]

The stranger was gradually becoming irritable:

[? ? ?]

[I didn't even use a beauty filter! If you don't believe us, then add me on WeChat. Let's video call!!!]

Jiang Xing really wanted to see how the scammer was going to go about this, so he willingly added this phone number on WeChat. Immediately after, the scammer sent over the video call request.

Jiang Xing didn't intend to reveal his face so he covered the camera. In this way, he could see the other side, but the other side could not see him. Soon, his

“wife” appeared in his vision.

That CGI game face suddenly came alive. He could even clearly see the teardrop mole at the corner of the young man’s eye.

As everyone knew, video calls couldn’t be edited.

Lin Qingyu couldn’t see Jiang Xing. He could only see darkness. “Jiang Xing?”

When no one responded, Lin Qingyu called out again, “Laogong?”

Jiang Xing’s Adam’s apple bobbed. “En.”

Just this simple “en” was enough for Lin Qingyu to conclude that it was Jiang Xing’s voice. The heavy stone in his heart finally fell. The most urgent matter was to meet up with Jiang Xing first. He’ll settle scores with him later.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Where are you?”

Jiang Xing replied in a daze, “At my aunt’s house.”

“Come and pick me up. I’m…” Lin Qingyu looked at Ke Tang, “Where are we

now?"

Ke Tang said, "I'll message you the address!"

Lin Qingyu nodded and said to Jiang Xing, "I'll be waiting for you."

After hanging up the video, Jiang Xing engaged in an inner struggle at the sight of the address the stranger sent over.

He has common sense, he swears he does. But the super good-looking young man called him 'laogong'.

The young man's expression completely didn't seem like he was lying. Besides, would anyone with looks like that have to sink so low as to commit something

like phone fraud? And even if he really did want to swindle him, why choose a place full of security?

Most importantly, he himself felt that he had seen his "wife" somewhere.

Jiang Xing stood up. He grabbed his schoolbag and walked out. As he was heading out, he happened to run into his aunt who was back from grocery shopping. His aunt said, "A'Xing, it's time for dinner. Are you still going out?"

Jiang Xing said, "I'm going to see a classmate."

"Then have the driver take you."

"No, I'll just take the subway. It'll be faster."

Ke Tang, the good Samaritan, decided to see this through to the end. She asked her supervisor for a half hour break and guided Lin Qingyu out of the venue. She then kept him company as he waited for his husband by the side of the road. Not for anything else, she just wanted to know where this beauty's husband got the confidence to quarrel with his wife, pretending not to even

know him. If she had a wife like this, she'd even swear he was her ancestor just to get him to stay. How dare that slag man do him dirty like this!

The great beauty had put on the mask but he still attracted a lot of attention. It couldn't be helped. The clothes he had on were too luxurious. How could those be considered clothes? He was practically wearing a car.

Lin Qingyu watched as cars galloped past in front of him, their speeds unmatched by any of the Dayu's thousand-mile horses. Jiang Xing's hometown was even more bizarre than he imagined. Unfortunately, before he was back

with Jiang Xing, he simply didn't have the heart to appreciate and explore it at all.

Will Jiang Xing drive to pick him up?

Suddenly, Lin Qingyu's pupils shrank. He pointed at something that was moving and said, "What is that? It's moving so slowly."

Ke Tang looked in the direction he was pointing at. "What? What?"

"The thing with the basket in front of it."

Ke Tang was confused, "You mean the shared bicycle?"

"Oh, my husband is here." Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes, "He came on a shared bicycle."

There were several people coming towards them on shared bicycles but Ke Tang could tell at a glance which one was the great beauty's husband.

It was a boy wearing a black mask, headphones around his neck, a backpack slung on his back. Riding the bicycle against the wind, his bangs were swept back. His slightly upturned eyes were very charming, brimming with the aura of youth.

Even if she couldn't see his face clearly, the boy still gave her a "refreshing and handsome" feeling. Was it because of temperament? Or height? Or figure?

Maybe the outfit?

But the boys' clothes were also very simple — a loose T-shirt, black trousers and sneakers, like what most teenage boys wear. It's strange. Why did he look so sexy in that outfit?

The boy stopped the bicycle in front of them. He looked towards them and asked uncertainly, "Hi?"

Lin Qingyu took off his mask and met Jiang Xing's eyes.

Jiang Xing's heart beat faster.

Lin Qingyu walked up to Jiang Xing and ordered, "Take off your mask."

Jiang Xing paused and though confused, obediently took off his mask.

——It was Jiang Xing; Jiang Xing with short hair, Jiang Xing wearing his hometown clothes, the same Jiang Xing who appeared in both his dreams.

Lin Qingyu thought of Jiang Xing's excessive "joke" and wanted to slap him on the face. He raised his hand and he was about to let him have it but Jiang Xing seemed to be in a daze and he made no move to dodge.

Lin Qingyu's hand slowly dropped. How could he be willing to hurt Jiang

Xing?

And so, abandoning himself, he threw himself into the young man's arms.

Jiang Xing's eyes suddenly went wide. He smelled a light, familiar scent of medicinal herbs.

"Why'd you only get here now?" Lin Qingyu embraced him tightly. "I thought I was going to be separated from you again. I was so scared."

Jiang Xing raised his hands but in the end, he didn't touch the handsome boy's body. He felt something hot roll down the boy's cheek against his shoulder. He said, at a loss, "Hey…"

Standing to one side, Ke Tang, who was about ready to swoon, received a WeChat message from her supervisor urging her to go back to work. She had to break away from this beautiful scene in before her eyes. "Well, I still have something to do in the exhibition hall."

Lin Qingyu straightened up. He restrained his emotions and said, "In the future, my husband and I will find a chance to thank you."

Ke Tang waved her hands again and again, "It's fine. It's fine. It's what I should have done." As she spoke, she cast another subtle look at Jiang Xing. She shouldn't have cared about the affairs of these handsome guys, but she really

didn't want to see the beauty being wronged. "Xiao gege, when you get back your phone, can you add me on WeChat?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Sure."

Ke Tang smiled. "Then I'll be going first."

Now that he had returned to Jiang Xing's side, Lin Qingyu finally felt safe and was ready to settle accounts. "Why did you say you didn't know me just now?" Lin Qingyu said coldly, "Was it fun playing that joke?"

Jiang Xing's heartbeat still hadn't calmed down. But he was very good at pretending. No matter how nervous he was, he could pretend nothing was wrong. "It's not that, buddy. Should I know you?"

Lin Qingyu's heart sank. "What do you mean? You've already forgotten about me after only an hour apart?"

"What? What?"

Lin Qingyu's face was frighteningly cold. "Jiang Xing, I'm not any mood to joke around with you right now."

"No, don't be angry. I was wrong." Jiang Xing apologized out of instinct. "Maybe I forgot. Just give me a hint, anything is fine. I will try my best to

remember."

Lin Qingyu said, "Honeymoon, Yuzhang, carriage."

Jiang Xing frowned. "We were in a carriage together?"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Judging by Jiang Xing's expression, he really didn't remember him.

If his conjecture was correct, Xu Junyuan's strange stone that had the effect of stabilizing the soul, brought Jiang Xing back to his body in Guangzhou. While, he himself since he had no body in Guangzhou, was sent over with both his soul and original body. The last time Jiang Xing returned to his original body in the Dayu, he was unable to speak for a period of time. His amnesia this time was probably also a side effect of returning to his old body.

But what if he was wrong? If… If the Jiang Xing in front of him has no memory of being in the Dayu at all? And if this Jiang Xing was not that Jiang Xing, then what should he do?

Seeing the beauty in gorgeous clothes frown, his lips pursed tightly, his eyes at a loss, as if he had been bullied and suffered a great grievance, Jiang Xing felt

inexplicably panicked and he couldn't help but say, "But, I really think I've seen you somewhere."

Could he be an elementary school classmate? Impossible, his memory was quite good. If there'd been such a handsome boy among his classmates, how could he not remember?

Lin Qingyu was taken aback. "You think I look familiar?"

"Yes, you give me a very familiar feeling. But I don't think you could be my wife." Jiang Xing originally wanted to say that he was a straight and underage. It was impossible that he'd have a male wife. But when the words reached his lips, he changed them again, "I'm not that lucky."

Lin Qingyu breathed a sigh of relief. Jiang Xing had a vague impression of him, which proved that his conjecture was correct. Jiang Xing's memory was still there, it just needed a little time to recover. "Let me ask you, do you have a wife now?"

"……No."

Lin Qingyu was a little more satisfied. "Then I'll be your wife, okay?"

Jiang Xing: "…"

Calm down, Jiang Xing. No matter how good-looking the other party is, he's still a stranger from who knows where. Even if you want to bend, you can't

bend so hastily. You've got to at least go through some inner struggle and conflict.

Jiang Xing smiled. "Sorry, you're not my type."

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Are you sure? If we're talking about looks, I should be everyone's type."

Jiang Xing looked at the other person's face, but couldn't say anything to refute.

Lin Qingyu chuckled softly. "Laogong, I'm hungry."

Intuition told Jiang Xing that the boy didn't have the slightest malice towards him and the boy really did seem to know him. Reason told him too that

casually believing a stranger was death seeking behavior. But this time, he just wanted to trust his instincts.

Jiang Xing thought it over and said, “If you say you’re not a liar, I’ll take you to eat delicious food.”

Lin Qingyu said, “I’m not a liar.”

Jiang Xing was still not at ease. “Swear it.”

Lin Qingyu was quite speechless. “I swear I’m not a liar.”

“Okay.” Jiang Xing said, “What do you want to eat?”

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Extra Story 8

Mobile phones, cameras, cars, air conditioners weren't the only things Lin Qingyu knew about Jiang Xing's hometown. He also knew a little about the food here. Fortunately, Jiang Xing often talked to him about these things. Otherwise, he wouldn't be able to maintain his composure in this strange world.

"I want to eat what you often eat." Lin Qingyu said.

What Jiang Xing most frequently ate were the housekeeper's home cooked meals. During the National Day holiday, their housekeeper had asked for leave and when his aunt heard about it, she invited him over to eat. Obviously, he couldn't bring a stranger to his aunt's house. It didn't cost much to treat

someone to a meal. He'll just treat it as entertaining an online friend he was finally meeting face-to-face.

Jiang Xing saw a shopping mall near the exhibition hall and suggested, "Shall we go to the shopping mall?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Shopping mall? Do they sell your clothes there? I want to change." It was really quite hot here and not only was his current outfit very eye-catching, it could also cause heat stroke if worn for too long.

Jiang Xing looked at the beauty quietly — Is it not enough that you're cheating me out of a meal, you're also cheating me out of a set of clothes?

Fine, with your beauty, being cheated is worth it.

The two walked to the entrance of the mall. Lin Qingyu didn't have a mobile phone and couldn't scan his code to enter. Fortunately, he could register manually.

Lin Qingyu looked at the strangely shaped pen and said to Jiang Xing, "You write for me."

Jiang Xing was a little puzzled. He picked up the pen and asked, "What's your

name?"

"Lin Qingyu."

Jiang Xing paused. "Which Qingyu?"

"The Qing for clear and the Yu for feathers."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "What a coincidence. I just read a novel called "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch" and there was a character named Lin Qingyu in it."

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "En, I'm that Lin Qingyu from "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch"."

Jiang Xing thought he must have heard wrong. "Huh?"

The two of them standing there at the entrance to the mall, registering, meant that they were in the way of others who wanted to get in. Jiang Xing didn't

have time to ask and simply said, “What’s your ID number and mobile phone number?”

Lin Qingyu said, “I don’t have that sort of thing.”

Something was wrong; something was very wrong. Jiang Xing put down the pen and took Lin Qingyu aside. He asked, “What did you mean by that just now?”

“I meant what I said literally.” Lin Qingyu said, “I am from the Dayu and you and I also met in the Dayu.”

Jiang Xing looked like he’d seen a ghost. This… should he praise Lin Qingyu’s con for being novel?

Lin Qingyu thought it necessary to explain clearly to Jiang Xing. “It’s a long story. Let’s go someplace cool and I’ll explain to you in detail.”

Jiang Xing regained his composure and saw a nearby milk tea dessert shop that didn’t require you to register. And so he took Lin Qingyu inside and sat him down. “You wait here for me.”

“Where are you going?”

“Aren’t you hungry?” Ever since Lin Qingyu said he was hungry, it kept

nagging in his mind, “I’ll go buy you something to eat.”

Lin Qingyu’s lips curved into a smile. “Thank you.”

Jiang Xing bought two cups of milk tea, four donuts and eight egg tarts. He inserted the straw for Lin Qingyu and handed it over. “Here, try it.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t take it. Instead, as though it were the most natural thing in the world, he took Jiang Xing’s hand, bowed his head and took a sip of the milk tea. Surprise flashed in his eyes. “Jiang Xing, this is delicious. I like it.”

After standing in the sun for a while, Lin Qingyu’s cheeks were slightly reddish, looking more enticing than the donuts.

Jiang Xing couldn’t help laughing. “You’re so cute.” As soon as the words were out, he was stunned.

What is he saying? How could he say such frivolous things to a boy he’d just met for the first time? When did he get so greasy?

Lin Qingyu has long been accustomed to Jiang Xing’s “greasiness”. He took two big mouthfuls of milk tea and ate an egg tart. When he no longer felt so

hungry, he said, “Have you ever thought that one day you would be transmigrated into the world of “Huai’s Refusal of the Monarch”?”

“……Never.”

Lin Qingyu explained everything in detail. He and Jiang Xing met each other, got to know each other and fell in love; from the Nan’an Hou’s Mansion to the General’s Mansion, and finally to the Imperial Palace. Jiang Xing had died three times and they were married three times. Finally, he talked about Xu Junyuan, “I don’t know if Xu Junyuan has already found out that we’ve left the Dayu. But if he knows what’s good for him, he should already be thinking of a way to get us back.”

After Jiang Xing heard Lin Qingyu’s words, his first reaction wasn’t to call 110. Instead, he thought of that dream he had during his nap. He dreamt that he’d

lived and died, died and lived again and there was a beauty in a wedding dress —these were basically consistent with what Lin Qingyu had said.

He seriously suspected that he was going out of his mind. He actually felt that what Lin Qingyu said wasn't completely made up.

Lin Qingyu saw that Jiang Xing still didn't believe him yet so he raised his hand, pointed at Jiang Xing's Adam's apple and said, "You have a mole here."

Jiang Xing instinctively looked down. His headphones were still hanging around his neck, blocking his Adam's apple, so Lin Qingyu shouldn't have been able to see it.

Lin Qingyu continued, "Your birthday is on the fifth of October. Your mother was a very strong person and was very strict with you. She forced you to learn ancient Chinese calligraphy and required you to be proficient in everything. You didn't disappoint her and though tired of studying, you still manage to

secure first place. You are very good at attaching protective screens and you can play the Xiqin—for you, it should be called an Erhu…"

Jiang Xing ate a donut to calm his shock. "Did you investigate me?"

"You have a secret that no one knows. When you were in second grade of elementary school, you once broke your mother's perfume bottle and then blamed it on your little dog. The dog's name was Xiao Mi."

"Who told you all this? Jiang Xing asked incredulously, "My cousin?" No, even Pei Zhiqi didn't know that he'd framed Xiao Mi.

"You told me yourself." Lin Qingyu said, "You're the only one who knows about this, aren't you?"

Jiang Xing's entire being was torn.

Who is he? Where is he? Is this world real or not?

Lin Qingyu saw a shop selling fishing gear opposite their shop and added, "You also like fishing."

Jiang Xing had fallen in love with fishing when he was Gu Fuzhou. He said that fishing was the most wonderful sport in the world. Later, Jiang Xing became the emperor and he had very little free time. He wanted to sleep, cling

to him and occasionally fish. So he would ask him to accompany him to sleep or go fishing with him.

Finally, Lin Qingyu was wrong about one thing. Jiang Xing calmed down and said, “I don’t like it.” He doesn’t even know how to fish.

Lin Qingyu said, “No, you like it.”

Jiang Xing was very sure. “No, I don’t like it.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t want to waste his words. He stood up and said, “If you don’t believe me, go and have a look at that store.”

Jiang Xing froze as soon as he stepped into the fishing shop. Why did he feel like he was in heaven? He felt as much joy here as he did visiting a sneaker store. He suddenly felt that not only could he fish, but that he could fish with ease. The entire Pearl River wasn’t enough for him to fish.

It was over. He already felt in his heart that what Lin Qingyu said was the truth. Is he crazy or is the world crazy?

Jiang Xing had a somber expression on his face, saying nothing. Lin Qingyu thoughtfully said nothing, giving him enough time to digest. When the two returned to the street, blown by the sweltering wind, Lin Qingyu finally

understood why Jiang Xing always said that air conditioners saved people's lives.

Before Lin Qingyu could speak, he heard Jiang Xing whisper, "Clothes."

"What?"

"You have to change out of that Hanfu before we talk about anything else." Jiang Xing still had countless questions in his mind, but the strange thing was that he was more concerned about whether Lin Qingyu felt hot in his outfit.

“I’ll take you to my house and you can wear my clothes for now — Is that all right?”

“Of course its fine. I’ve always wanted to visit your house.” Lin Qingyu said, “How do we get there?”

Jiang Xing turned on his phone and glanced at the taxi app. It was the National Day holiday and it was dinner time, there were a lot of people taking taxis and the APP warned him that he’d have to wait at least 20 minutes.

“I want to try riding that.” Lin Qingyu pointed to a car passing in front of them. “Can you drive?”

Jiang Xing’s heart tightened and he said, a little bit defensively, “Uh, no.”

Lin Qingyu was a little disappointed. “I thought you could do everything.”

Jiang Xing felt that he’d been dealt a violent hit.

Lin Qingyu remembered that Jiang Xing came here on a shared bicycle. He asked, “Are we going home on a shared bicycle?”

“Let me take you to take the subway.” Jiang Xing said leisurely, “You came all the way from the Dayu, how could you miss Line 3 and Line 5 during the evening rush in Guangzhou? I must take you to experience it.”

“Subway?” Lin Qingyu looked around and saw a sign with the word “subway”

written on it, “Are we going there?”

Jiang Xing’s face changed slightly and he thought he had caught a flaw. “Wait a minute, if you’re really from ancient times, how can you read simplified characters? You also know about shared bicycles?”

“You taught me.”

“Okay, my apologies.”

Lin Qingyu walked towards the subway station, but was stopped by Jiang Xing. “I was just kidding with you,” Jiang Xing said with a smile, “You can’t squeeze into the subway with your clothes like that.”

Jiang Xing called their family driver. “Uncle Chen, it’s me. Are you free now? Can you come and pick me up? …No, not the one near the school. It’s the

holidays, I'm not staying there anymore. It's the one in Zhujiang New Town. My current location is…"

It would take about ten minutes for the driver to get to them. Jiang Xing hung up the phone. He looked at the beauty in splendid clothes holding a cup of milk tea and called out hesitantly, "Lin Qingyu?"

Huh? Why did it feel so awkward?

Lin Qingyu raised his head, furrowed his brows and said, displeased, "What did you call me?"

Jiang Xing quickly changed his words. "Qingyu." As soon as he said this, Jiang Xing suddenly became enlightened and at ease. "How about you take the wig off first? Just looking at it makes me feel hot. It must be worse for you."

"Have you gone dumb from shock?" Lin Qingyu sighed, "This is my hair."

Men in ancient times did have long hair. Jiang Xing stared at Lin Qingyu's long locks of hair hanging down his chest and said, "Are you really not wearing a wig?"

"En." Lin Qingyu knew that Jiang Xing liked touching his hair, "Do you want to

touch it?”

Jiang Xing was stunned. He asked, “Can I touch it?”

Lin Qingyu said, “If it’s you, you’re free to touch it.” Jiang Xing had touched every part of his body, inside and out.

Jiang Xing stretched out his hand and carefully picked up Lin Qingyu’s long hair. It was very light, very soft; silky and cool.

In an instant, a picture vaguely flashed through Jiang Xing’s mind: he and Lin Qingyu were lying together on a large bed. Lin Qingyu was lying on his back and he was lying on his side, carelessly playing with Lin Qingyu’s long silky hair.

Holy crap, Lin Qingyu really did seem to be his wife.

This was cause for celebration!

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Extra Story 9

The person who came to pick them up was a middle-aged man with extremely short hair driving a black car. Lin Qingyu could tell that this car was cleaner and more refined than most other cars on the road. Just as there were bad horses and good horses, there were also good cars and bad cars.

Lin Qingyu saw a circular sign erected at the very front of the car; a circle that was evenly divided into thirds. Did this have some profound meaning?

Jiang Xing has always gotten along with their family driver. Their driver didn't need to come down and open the door for them. They were normal people, there was no need to put on any sort of show. Jiang Xing opened the door to

the back seat and made a gesture of invitation. “Go on in. Didn’t you want to ride one of these?”

Lin Qingyu bent over to get in and then sat up. Jiang Xing then got in and greeted the driver, “Uncle Chen.”

The driver grinned. “It’s been a long time.” The driver saw Lin Qingyu from the rearview mirror and said in surprise, “A’Xing, is this your classmate?”

The driver and Jiang Xing spoke Cantonese, but Jiang Xing answered him in Mandarin. “No, he’s not.”

He wasn’t a classmate but the driver tacitly understood that he was a friend. The driver also switched to Mandarin. “Why is your friend wearing ancient clothes? Is he a celebrity?”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “No, we just came back from the Hanfu Fair.”

“Hanfu? Oh, I know, it’s very popular among young people nowadays.”

“Yes.” Jiang Xing replied casually, “Uncle Chen, please turn down the temperature of the air conditioning. We walked around outside and it was so hot.”

The driver lowered the temperature by two degrees and complained, “At this

rate, it won't be cold until November."

Lin Qingyu listened to the conversation between Jiang Xing and the man. In his estimation, the man should be someone like a groom but Jiang Xing had called him 'uncle' and he talked as if they were equals.

Jiang Xing did the same when he was in the Dayu. When Xiao Songzi brings him tea and water, he would occasionally get a "thank you" from the emperor and it made Xiao Songzi feel was if his life were about to end. He begged Jiang Xing to let him go, crying bitterly. Only then did Jiang Xing restrain himself.

The corners of Lin Qingyu's lips quietly ticked up.

This Jiang Xing, who was gentle and courteous to others, had another kind of cuteness that couldn't be seen in the Dayu.

With Jiang Xing by his side, Lin Qingyu was finally in the mood to appreciate this strange world. He looked out the window and saw all kinds of shops lining the road. He knew every word on the shops and didn't know what it meant when they were connected together. There were also tall buildings rising from the ground. They went up so high, how were people about to go up?

As the sky gradually darkened, lights went on in every building, lighting up Lin Qingyu's eyes.

This was Jiang Xing's hometown, so bright, so colorful. There were air conditioners and mobile phones; there were generous girls working outside,

cars that run faster than thousand-li horses and sweet milk tea and egg tarts.

Jiang Xing grew up in such a world.

It was so nice.

The driver drove the car directly into the community's underground garage. Before getting out of the car, Jiang Xing said, "Thank you, Uncle Chen."

"No need to be so polite. Your family pays me." The driver smiled and said, "Call me anytime you need anything."

After the driver left, Lin Qingyu asked, "Is the person who drove a servant of your family?"

Jiang Xing choked then said with lingering fear, "That was a close call."

"What do you mean?"

"It's a good thing you didn't ask me this question in the car." Jiang Xing toes curled in mortification just imagining that scene, "Or it would have definitely meant my social death."

Lin Qingyu asked, "What does social death mean?"

"Human death is divided into two types. One is normal death and the other is

social death…"

Lin Qingyu was extremely intelligent and he immediately understood with just this hint. He snorted coldly and said, "I'm not stupid. Of course, I wouldn't have asked in front of the driver. However, your driver seems to speak differently from us."

"Oh, that's because he's lived in a Cantonese-speaking area his whole life. Naturally, he'd have a bit of an accent when speaking in Mandarin."

"Then why don't you have such an accent?" Lin Qingyu then remembered, "Ah, that's right. It's because you only came back to Guangzhou when you entered high school. You told me that when you were in the Dayu."

Jiang Xing made a "tsk" sound. "I used to tell you everything, huh? Am I that much of a chatterer in front of you? Conan says 'my father taught me this in

Hawaii‘ while you come here to Guangzhou and say ‘my husband taught me this in the Dayu’?”

“There are still many things you haven’t told me. For example, how do we go up this building soaring into the sky?”

“Thank you for finally acting like an ancient and allowing me my dignity as a person of modern times.” Jiang Xing led Lin Qingyu to a strange door, “We’ll take the elevator up.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Elevator?”

No matter how much Jiang Xing talked about it, he couldn’t cover everything. For example, the elevator, Jiang Xing never mentioned it to him.

Jiang Xing briefly introduced the principle behind the elevator, “The elevator uses a traction drive method and the core of the drive mechanism lies in…”

Lin Qingyu interrupted him, “In short, we can go up when we ride this box.”

Jiang Xing snapped his fingers. “That’s a good summary.”

Aside from the door in front of them, there was another one not far away. Lin

Qingyu asked, “Is that other one also an elevator?”

“En, that’s a housekeeper’s elevator.”

“Housekeeper?”

Jiang Xing described to him a housekeeper’s duties. Lin Qingyu nodded. “I understand. A housekeeper is a servant.”

Jiang Xing explained patiently, “A housekeeper is not a servant. They are employed on an equal footing with us. So, when you interact with our housekeeper in the future, you can’t treat her like a servant, just treat her like an ordinary elder. When you’ve got nothing to say, just say ‘thank you’ a few more times and the food she cooks will taste even better.”

Lin Qingyu was puzzled, “Since you’re equals then why don’t the housekeepers and owners take the same elevator?”

Jiang Xing was stumped by his question. In order to maintain his omniscient image in front of Lin Qingyu, he could only come up with a universal answer, “Why are the elevators separate, you say? Well, I believe you are familiar with elevators, but elevators have to be separated. Why must they be separated, you

say? Housekeepers must take the housekeeper's elevator and the owners must take the –…"

Lin Qingyu's eyes twitched. "Fine, shut up."

Entering the elevator, Lin Qingyu watched the number gradually increase from -1, finally stopping at 26. Lin Qingyu heard a "ding", and the elevator door opened. Jiang Xing began to change his shoes. "We're here." He helped Lin Qingyu take out a new pair of indoor slippers, "I'll get you some clothes. You can sit wherever you want. Do you want to take a shower first?"

Lin Qingyu looked around curiously, "Yes."

Jiang Xing went to his wardrobe, picked out a T-shirt and a pair of shorts he'd only wore once, took out a new bath towel and placed them in the bathroom.

Back in the living room, he saw Lin Qingyu leaning over and touching the sofa, his expression looking a little wrong.

Jiang Xing asked, “What’s wrong?”

Lin Qingyu hesitated to speak. “It’s nothing.”

“Then should I show you to the bathroom?”

Lin Qingyu said, “There’s no rush.” Jiang Xing’s house must also have air conditioning since he didn’t feel hot at all now. “Show me around your house first.”

Jiang Xing was a little confused. “Okay.”

Starting from the living room, Lin Qingyu followed Jiang Xing to see the dining room, the entertainment room, the L-shaped balcony, the kitchen, the

master's bedroom, the elders' bedroom, the guest bedroom, the study room and even the housekeeper's room.

"Auntie's on leave. I'll be the only one in this house for the whole holiday—well, now you're here too."

Lin Qingyu frowned, "Your house is really…"

Jiang Xing was very self-effacing "It's a little big for just one person but you just need to get used to it."

"Your house is really small. It's so small, is it enough for you to live in? There's not even a garden or a pond. If you want to fish, you'll have to go out." Lin Qingyu looked at Jiang Xing lovingly and sympathetically, "You really have such a tough life here."

Jiang Xing went silent for a long time. He then said hesitantly, "Might I ask, what did you do before you married me?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Originally, I was the son of the imperial medical office's panyuan. Later, I became an Imperial Physician and finally, I was prime minister of the imperial court."

"I'm sorry, I'm so sorry. Turns out you're the Lord Prime Minister, hahaha." Jiang Xing gave a sheepish smile, feeling awkward at having been rude. "This

place of ours really isn't fit to house the third in command of a nation. I've wronged the Lord Prime Minister."

"There's no need for that. I'm your wife. Naturally, I won't dislike you over something like this." Lin Qingyu thought for a while and asked, "Is there a pawn shop in Guangzhou?"

"A pawnshop? When I was young, I occasionally saw one or two but it'll probably be difficult to find one now." Jiang Xing said, "Lord Prime Minister, why are you asking this?"

"Find a pawnshop and sell these clothes. The money can help cover our living expenses."

Jiang Xing said with a complicated expression, "Um, thank you?"

"If it's not enough, there's still this jade pendant." When Lin Qingyu transmigrated, he'd been wearing around his waist a beautiful jade pendant of

the finest quality, a tribute from the north. “And if that’s still not enough, the only thing left to pawn is our wedding ring.”

“Wedding ring?”

“En, you specially designed it.” Lin Qingyu took off the ring and showed it to Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing carefully inspected it inside and out. It really did look like his design style.

Jiang Xing was at a loss. “What about my wedding ring?”

Lin Qingyu said, “It should still be on your body in the Dayu.”

Jiang Xing became unhappy. “A wedding ring is such an important thing, how could you even think of selling it?”

“It’s because I don’t want you living in such poverty.” Lin Qingyu has always paid little attention to things outside of him. The reason why this ring was significant was because it was given to him by Jiang Xing. To him, Jiang Xing was more important than anything else. “We still have one ring. You gave this to me when we were married for the third time. If you think it’s a pity, you can give me another later.”

Jiang Xing laughed, “Okay, okay.”

Jiang Xing took Lin Qingyu to his en suite bathroom. Lost memories aside, he and Lin Qingyu have only been together for a few hours, but he can already

understand Lin Qingyu's thoughts about all these modern things just from his expression. For example, Lin Qingyu's slightly inquisitive eyes meant that he didn't know how to use the things in the bathroom.

"This is for hot water and this is for cold water." Jiang Xing demonstrated to Lin Qingyu how to adjust the water temperature, "Then apply this on your body. You can use the stuff in the blue bottle to wash your hair. I'll put away your clothes for you and then I'll go out. Call me anytime you have any questions."

Lin Qingyu asked, "You're going out?"

Jiang Xing choked but quickly recovered. He said with a smile, "If I don't go out then should I stay here and watch you?"

Although Lin Qingyu wanted Jiang Xing to recover all his memories as soon as possible, he didn't want to push him too hard. As the saying goes, haste makes waste. He nodded and said, "Then you can go out."

Jiang Xing walked out of the bathroom, closed the door and suddenly felt like he'd just missed out on a million dollars.

Everything that happened today was too fantastical. If this was before, Jiang Xing would think it nothing but a low-end scam. But he couldn't explain the feeling Lin Qingyu brought to him. Nor could he explain the scenes that flashed in his mind. Pity that the scenes were just scenes and didn't show the

whole plot. He wants to remember what happened in the Dayu as soon as possible. He didn't want to disappoint Lin Qingyu.

Jiang Xing stood in front of the French windows and thought for almost half an hour, but he still couldn't remember any useful information.

"Jiang Xing."

Jiang Xing turned around and the newly bathed beauty came into view. Jiang Xing quickly looked away. He took a sip of ice-cold cola before turning his gaze back to Lin Qingyu.

What he brought to Lin Qingyu was a pure white T-shirt. The fabric was pure cotton so it easily turned translucent when wet. At this time, Lin Qingyu's wet long hair already turned it half-wet.

Under the lights of the living room chandelier, Lin Qingyu's porcelain-white skin exposed no blemishes—except for the original teardrop mole. His long lashes were also wet, the tip of his nose, a little red and his lips were smudged into a bright color by the steam. He didn't know if he was bent or not but it didn't seem to matter as if he weren't already bent, he quickly was becoming one.

When Jiang Xing saw Lin Qingyu wearing fancy clothes, he thought him noble and dignified, a lonely unmatched existence at the peak. Now in modern clothes, Jiang Xing only just realized how long and straight Lin Qingyu's legs. He was about six to seven centimeters taller than Lin Qingyu and his T-shirt

was obviously a little too big for Lin Qingyu. It obviously had a standard-sized ordinary collar but with the Lin Qingyu wore it, it was quickly slipping off his shoulder.

Lin Qingyu was a little thin, tiny fishes could swim in his collarbones. Coupled with his long hair that reached his waist, viewed from the back or side, he looked a little like a girl. Few men could look so delicate, but Lin Qingyu's

appearance wasn't feminine. If he cut his hair short, no one would mistake his gender.

To distract himself, Jiang Xing handed him what he had in his hand and said with a smile, "You're done with your bath? Come on, try this. I'll get the hair dryer."

"The hair dryer is for drying your hair? No, I'll just wipe it dry." Lin Qingyu looked at the bottle of black water and asked, "What is this?"

"It's soda, a kind of water that can make people happy. It's best for drinking after taking a bath in summer."

"But isn't it October?"

Jiang Xing shrugged. "October here is no different from midsummer."

Lin Qingyu took the soda. He first lowered his head and sniffed it, then took a sip. His expression froze.

Jiang Xing asked with a smile, "Is it good?"

"It's a bit sweet and it also has a stimulation that's hard to describe. I don't like it very much." Lin Qingyu raised his head, "Jiang Xing, I want to drink milk tea."

Jiang Xing said, "Don't anymore. You've already had one today and you've

eaten so many desserts. You won't be able to sleep at night if you drink anymore."

Lin Qingyu wasn't very happy. Jiang Xing has always been responsive to his requests but now that he was in his own territory, he dared to refuse him. He asked Jiang Xing, "Is milk tea expensive? So you can't afford too much?"

Jiang Xing couldn't help but laugh. "Well, I suppose it is kinda expensive but it's not that I can't afford it. Don't be angry, let's drink it again tomorrow." Without Jiang Xing knowing it, his tone had already turned coaxing, "That shop today was one that I just found randomly. To be honest, the taste was so-so. Tomorrow I'll buy you milk tea that is a hundred times better."

Lin Qingyu asked doubtfully, "Really? A hundred times?"

Jiang Xing assured him. "Really, a hundred times better."

Lin Qingyu reluctantly accepted this plan, temporarily letting go of his obsession with milk tea. He pointed to the irregularly-shaped glowing cylindrical building very close to them outside the floor-to-ceiling windows and asked, "What's that?"

Jiang Xing said, "That's Canton Tower. Because it looks like a human waist, it's also nicknamed 'Slim Waist'." "Slim Waist is a landmark building in Guangzhou and one of the must-see attractions for tourists." Seeing it just outside their window, Jiang Xing had long grown numb to it. "If you like it, I'll take you to

see it tomorrow night. But it's a holiday now, so there must be a lot of people going there."

Lin Qingyu asked, "Who was the person who designed and built Slim Waist?"

Jiang Xing said, "We can look it up on the internet. Why do you ask?"

"I want to see him. It might prove rewarding." Lin Qingyu pondered, "Dayu's Minister of Public Works recently took leave to mourn the passing of his parent. We are in urgent need of someone to succeed him. Since this person was able to design Slim Waist, he must be a very talented person. If we can seek his advice…"

Jiang Xing almost spit out his mouthful of Coke. He suppressed a smile and said solemnly, "Don't make your decision too rashly. Next time, I'll take you to Beijing and Shanghai to have a look around. You might find a better candidate

for the 'Minister of Public Works'. Oh, would you like to read the financial news and select the Minister of the Revenue while you're at it."

Lin Qingyu asked, puzzled, "What are you laughing at?"

Jiang Xing had on a serious expression. "I'm not laughing."

Lin Qingyu looked at Jiang Xing as if he was looking at a fool. "You're obviously holding back your laughter."

Jiang Xing: "…" He thought he had pretty good acting skills. How was Lin Qingyu about to see through him?

Lin Qingyu saw through Jiang Xing's thoughts again. "We've been in a relationship for more than four years. I can tell what you're thinking just by your expression."

"More than four years?" Jiang Xing grasped the key point, "You mean we've been dating for more than four years?"

"Yes, we just had our fourth anniversary not too long ago."

After such a long time, they could be regarded as old married couple. Four years, a lot could be done in four years.

Jiang Xing couldn't help looking at Lin Qingyu's lips. He asked, "Then Qingyu,

have I… kissed you?”

Lin Qingyu said lightly, “What nonsense. You kiss me every day.”

Jiang Xing: “…”

With a wife this beautiful, it would be strange not to kiss him everyday.

“Then have we…?” Jiang Xing cleared his throat, and said as casually as he could manage “Have we had…”

Lin Qingyu looked up at him and said, “Does Laogong wish to ask if we’ve slept together?”

When he was in Dayu, if there were other people around, Lin Qingyu would always call Jiang Xing “the emperor”. If the two of them were alone, he would usually call Jiang Xing’s name directly. The number of times he’s called him Laogong can be counted on his fingers. But now he’s had an epiphany. When Jiang Xing called him “Baobei”, at first, he wasn’t used to it and even felt it was a little unnatural. Later, as Jiang Xing called him that more and more often, he

seemed to form a misconception – Obviously, he was supposed to be Jiang Xing's Baobei all along.

It could be deduced from this that if you wanted to turn a person into your husband, you should call him 'Laogong' every day.

A tingle went through Jiang Xing's whole body at being called 'Laogong'. He steadied his breathing, turned his eyes away and pretended to be calm as he said. "en".

Lin Qingyu smiled, "What do you think?"

The heat on Jiang Xing's body rose uncontrollably. He lowered his eyes and laughed lowly, "Don't laugh at me like that."

Lin Qingyu looked at him. "Why?"

Jiang Xing was quiet for a while. Then his hand holding the iced soda suddenly tightened. He raised his head and drank it all in one gulp.

The author has something to say:

Having written stories set in ancient times for so many years, I suddenly realized how fun writing modern Chinese can be! ! !

Me writing ancient Chinese: How should I gracefully describe the protagonist's shock (joyful, indignant, sorrowful) mood… (So painful.. just 500

words per hour)

Me writing modern settling: F*ck it all! We'll do it however I want!

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Extra Story 10

When it was time to go to bed, Jiang Xing gave Lin Qingyu his room. He explained one by one to Lin Qingyu how to turn on the lights, how to adjust

the temperature in the room and that there was water in the small refrigerator if he got thirsty.

Lin Qingyu pointed to a portrait of a dark-skinned man pasted on the wall above the top of the bed. He asked, “Who is this person?”

“A basketball star, I like him very much.” At the mention his idol, Jiang Xing couldn’t help but want to share, “I even have a pair of sneakers signed by him. Should I show you?”

“No need.” Lin Qingyu said indifferently, “You’ve never hung my portrait above the bed.”

Jiang Xing was startled, not knowing whether to laugh or cry. “This is different.”

Jiang Xing watched Lin Qingyu get into bed and covered him with the quilt. He even put both hands under the quilt and said, “Then I’m leaving. I’ll sleep in the guest room, you can find me if you need anything.”

Lin Qingyu gave a faint “en”. Not long ago, he was sharing the same bed with Jiang Xing, doing this and that, getting no sleep. But now he has to sleep in a separate bed. Outrageous!

Jiang Xing turned off the lamp for him. He walked to the door and

remembered something. He asked, “By the way, Qingyu, do you prefer white?”

Lin Qingyu was slightly happy. “Did you remember?”

“I just remembered a few scenes, you seem to wear a lot of white and blue.”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Indeed.” He usually wore white but the Dayu’s uniform for officials was indigo, so he wore these two colors the most.

Jiang Xing asked again, “Which color do you prefer, white or blue?”

Lin Qingyu said, “White.”

Jiang Xing smiled. “Understood, good night.”

Before going to sleep, Jiang Xing tidied up Lin Qingyu’s fancy clothes and took a few photos with his mobile phone. He didn’t know much about Hanfu and modified Hanfu, so he decided to seek help from a professional. He

remembered that Pei Zhiqi had joined the Hanfu club when she was in junior high school. So he sent the photo to Pei Zhiqi.

Jiang Xing: [How much do you think this modified Hanfu is worth?]

Pei Zhiqi: [! ! ! Where did you get that photo?!]

Jiang Xing: [Why so excited?]

Pei Zhiqi: [Check the local hot search!]

Jiang Xing opened Weibo, and sure enough, he saw two related trending searches: #Guangdong Hanfu Fair# and #His Highness the Crown Prince at large at the Hanfu Exhibit#.

Under the hot search were pictures of Lin Qingyu in his Chinese robes. He walked around the Hanfu exhibit with a chilly expression on his face, pulling up the attractiveness index of the whole event through his own efforts alone.

What the fuck did they mean His Highness the Crown Prince? This was obviously a beauty looking for his husband. Thinking that he was that husband, Jiang Xing chuckled, raised his hand and slowly covered his eyes.

… This was just too stimulating. Most people simply wouldn't be able to bear it.

Pei Zhiqi looked at those photos repeatedly and said: [If I were asked to

estimate the price, I think it would be worth upwards of a hundred thousand.]

Jiang Xing: [Too low.]

Early the next morning, Lin Qingyu woke up in Jiang Xing's room. Faced with the unfamiliar surroundings, he was momentarily dazed. A day has passed and Xu Junyuan still hasn't figured out a way to get them back. When he returns to the Dayu, he will definitely demolish Xu Junyuan's newly expanded meditation room.

When Lin Qingyu went to the guest room, the boy on the bed was still fast asleep. Jiang Xing was used having the air conditioner quite low, so the quilt wrapped around his body was wrapped tightly. Only half of his side profile was exposed outside the quilt.

Lin Qingyu sat down by the bed, touched the boy's dashing nose and then, without a shred of mercy, squeezed it.

Jiang Xing frowned. The air pressure around him seemed to have dropped. His eyes opened a slit, showing annoyance and sullenness. Lin Qingyu didn't seem to care. He said, "It's me."

As expected, the boy was momentarily at a loss. When he saw clearly that it was him, the irritability in his eyes instantly disappeared. He smiled dimly at Lin Qingyu, closed his eyes again and in a voice that sounded a little nasal due

to tiredness, said, “Let me sleep for a while longer, just a little while longer. Thank you, Baobei…”

For a moment, Lin Qingyu didn’t hear clearly, “What did you call me?”

Jiang Xing fell back asleep as soon as he closed his eyes. Lin Qingyu saw a book called “Five-Year College Entrance Examination, Three-Year Simulation” next to his pillow. The book was so big and thick that it could be used as a pillow.

He remembered that Jiang Xing must still be in his third year of high school. Jiang Xing said that in his hometown, the third year of high school was when people lacked sleep and rest the most. It was a rare vacation; maybe he should let him sleep for a while.

Lin Qingyu looked at the boy off in dreamland. Jiang Xing, who’d lost his memory of the past few years also seemed to be a few years younger. When Jiang Xing was Gu Fuzhou, he could act like a mature man on the outside no matter how he actually felt inside. Later, when Jiang Xing became the ruler of the country, he had cultivated himself to be a man equal to the task. One

moment he was a magnanimous and tolerant wise king and the next, he was an emperor who held all completely in his power.

Jiang Xing in his hometown was more like Jiang Xing in Lu Wancheng's time. If there weren't so many things that happened later, Jiang Xing might have continued like this forever.

Some indescribable emotion surged in Lin Qingyu's heart. He lifted up the quilt and got into bed. Finding his usual position in Jiang Xing's arms, he lay there for a while but he kept feeling a little uncomfortable.

Lin Qingyu realized the source of the discomfort. He took Jiang Xing's hand, and placed it on his waist.—Now, it felt right.

So, when Jiang Xing woke up sometime near noon, he realized that he'd gained a long-haired beauty in his arms. The beauty was resting on his arm, his shallow breathing ringing in his ears.

Jiang Xing's body went as stiff as a zombie's. His arm was already numb and might fall off at any moment. — When did Lin Qingyu get into bed?

He had a vague recollection of what had happened that morning. He was surprised that he showed no ill temper at all despite being woken up so early. Was that really me?

Jiang Xing didn't dare to move. He carefully reached for his mobile phone on the bedside table. It was just the slightest of movements, but it woke up the

light-sleeping beauty in his arms.

Jiang Xing lowered his head to meet Lin Qingyu's eyes and said calmly, "Good morning?"

"Good morning." Lin Qingyu said, "Did you remember something?"

Jiang Xing recalled carefully. "There are still only sporadic images in my mind."

Lin Qingyu smiled inexplicably. It seems there were some thingsthat were already engraved deep in Jiang Xing's soul. Even with his memories lost, his instincts remained. "Time to get up. It's almost time for lunch."

Lin Qingyu got out of bed and went to the bathroom. Yesterday Jiang Xing taught him how to wash using these modern tools. He was very interested in

this thing called “electric toothbrush”. It would be amazing if it could be used to clean some difficult-to-clean herbs.

As Lin Qingyu was washing his face, he noticed Jiang Xing staring at him from behind. He raised his eyes and met Jiang Xing’s eyes through the mirror. “What?”

Jiang Xing came over and brushed his long hair behind his ears, “Your hair got wet.”

Lin Qingyu glanced sideways at his long hair that slipped onto his shoulder. “It’s a bit troublesome. Can you hold it for me?”

Do you even have to fucking ask?

Jiang Xing stood behind Lin Qingyu, and when Lin Qingyu leaned over to wash his face, he held Lin Qingyu’s long hair to prevent it from getting wet. Because the white T-shirt Lin Qingyu was wearing was too big, from his towering view, he could vaguely see the other’s fair neck and a pair of attractive butterfly bones.

Thank you, I have just been seduced.

The affairs of life are oh so impermanent. In his memory, at this time yesterday, he was still standing here alone brushing his teeth and washing his

face but today he was helping his beautiful wife who fell from the sky by holding his hair.

“Do you have scissors at home?” Lin Qingyu wiped off the drops of water on his face, “I want to cut my long hair.” He had seen Jiang Xing with short hair in the Dayu. He’d wanted to try having short hair at that time but it was a pity

that he was the prime minister first and then after, the empress. He had no choice but to be prudent when it came to his demeanor.

Jiang Xing came back to his senses and asked, “You want to cut it yourself?”

“En.”

“What if you give yourself a bad haircut?”

“It’s fine.” Lin Qingyu stated the facts calmly, “A bad haircut won’t make me any less beautiful.”

Jiang Xing stared at the long hair in his hand and said slowly, “I should still take you out to have it cut.”

Lin Qingyu could hear the regret in Jiang Xing’s tone and asked, “You don’t want me to cut it?”

“That’s not it.” Jiang Xing smiled, “It’s your hair and you can decide what you want to do with it.”

Lin Qingyu observed Jiang Xing’s expression and said, “I’ll cut it tomorrow. You can say a proper goodbye to my strands today.”

Jiang Xing fondled Lin Qingyu’s long hair lovingly. “Time is running out. I

want to give each of them a name."

"Do as you wish."

Neither of them can cook so they could only order takeaway for lunch. "Qingyu, what do you want to eat?" He said boldly, "No need to be polite, order whatever you want."

Lin Qingyu naturally wouldn't be polite with his husband and the things he brought with him from the Dayu should be enough to improve Jiang Xing's poor life. "Three delicacies fish fillet, stuffed crab, crystal dragon and phoenix cake and stir-fried seasonal vegetables — Let's start with these for now."

Jiang Xing hesitated. "Excuse me, can you repeat your order, Lord Prime Minister?"

Jiang Xing wanted to prepare lunch and, afraid that Lin Qingyu would be bored by himself, he turned on the TV in the living room so that Lin Qingyu could watch while he waited. In order to make it easier for Lin Qingyu to understand, he even deliberately chose a period drama. Lin Qingyu was immediately attracted by the TV and he learned to change the channel without

having to be taught. He was so engrossed in watching that he didn't even notice the doorbell ring.

Jiang Xing opened the door, accepted the lunch delivery and arranged the dishes on the dining table. "Qingyu, come and eat—Qingyu?"

He called three times in a row before Lin Qingyu responded to him. Seeing the dishes on the table, Lin Qingyu asked, "How did these get here?"

"Of course someone else cooked it. I haven't learned enough cooking skills yet." Jiang Xing paused, "Did you want me to cook it?"

"No need. But your family doesn't have any servants, right?"

"Oh, I asked the steward for help."

"The steward?" Lin Qingyu looked around, unable to believe it, "Your family needs a steward for this small piece of land?"

Jiang Xing explained weakly, "The steward isn't mine alone. He's the steward for all the owners but it is a personalized service. It comes with high-end properties and is part of the 20,000 to 30,000 yuan property management fee…" Seeing that Lin Qingyu was about to say something, Jiang Xing clasped

his hands together in apology and said humbly, “Don’t scold me. Please don’t scold me. This child is well aware of his poverty.”

Lin Qingyu swallowed back his words and comforted him, “Things will get better.”

The dishes Lin Qingyu ordered were considered home-cooked dishes among the rich and powerful in the Dayu. But now they were in a foreign country. The taste naturally won’t be the same. It should have been improved. He tasted a few ingredient combinations he had never tried before. The taste was more layered.

Jiang Xing asked him, “Is it delicious?”

Lin Qingyu nodded lightly. “It’s not bad. It has its own distinct style, different from those produced by the Dayu’s Shangshi Bureau. It’s hard to tell which is better.”

Jiang Xing said in a drawn out manner, “It’s the least we can expect from a two-star Michelin restaurant.”

Lin Qingyu wondered. “What is Michelin?”

Jiang Xing earnestly educated his wife. “It’s a kind of tire.”

It is a joy to watch a beauty dine. Jiang Xing too had learned dining etiquette when he was a child but his loose personality and laziness made him want to

eat in bed. How could his feigned for-outsiders manners compare to Lin Qingyu's innate elegance?

When Lin Qingyu lowered his head to eat, his long hair would fall forward was well. He had to push back his hair from his face like a girl with long hair.

So fucking cute. Such an adorable beauty, could he really reign in all the civil and military officials as prime minister?

Jiang Xing was watching him with much enthusiasm when the landline in the living room rang, it was a call from the property manager. "Jiang Tongxue, I got your package and I've already sent someone to deliver it to you."

"Okay, thank you." Jiang Xing accepted the package then went to the study and rummaged through it. When he returned to the dining room, he had an old mobile phone in hand.

"This is the mobile phone I just got rid of and there's a SIM card in it." He said to Lin Qingyu, "It seems that an ID card is required to apply for new SIM cards

so you can use this one in the meantime."

Lin Qingyu said, "Alright, bring it here."

Jiang Xing didn't understand. "Bring what over there?"

Lin Qingyu asked suspiciously, "Aren't you going to give me your old phone?"

"I'm just taking out the card inside." Jiang Xing looked at him incredulously, "You even want to use my old phone? How dare you!"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. "What do you mean?"

"How could I possibly let you use my old mobile phone?" Jiang Xing held up the brand new box in his hand, "I've already taken you as my wife so, of course, you have to have the latest model."

Lin Qingyu said helplessly, "There you go again. Aren't you tired of this game?"

"Huh? Why did you say 'again'?"

Lin Qingyu said, "Every time you give me something, it's all very sudden and there's never any warning."

Jiang Xing was very satisfied. "As expected of me." He opened the box and

inside was a white mobile phone, “But this time, there was a warning.”

Lin Qingyu was slightly taken aback and then he understood. “This time doesn’t count and I don’t understand these things. If I did, I would definitely have been able to see through it.”

“That’s alright. If you don’t understand, I can teach you.” Jiang Xing inserted the SIM card and activated it, “First, I’ll teach you how to call me.”

“I’ll learn how to use the mobile phone later,” Lin Qingyu said, “I’ll finish watching the TV show first.”

“What show?”

What Lin Qingyu was so engrossed in was a Hong Kong police drama. Jiang Xing cut several kinds of fruits in the kitchen and brought them to the living room. He saw Lin Qingyu sitting on the carpet, staring intently at the TV.

“Qingyu, you shouldn’t sit so close to the TV or your eyes will tire.” Jiang Xing was stunned hearing himself say that and he couldn’t help complaining, “Hold on, I’m starting to sound like an old amah.”

Lin Qingyu raised his head to look at Jiang Xing. He stretched out his hands towards him. “Alright then, please carry me to the soft chair.”

Jiang Xing put down the fruit plate and sounded his agreement as

nonchalantly as he could.

Don't panic, you can do this. You can do this. This is your wife who you've been married to for more than four years. You've slept together who knows how many times. Right now, he's just asking you to carry him, that's all. Why the fuck as you so nervous?

After making the proper mental preparations, Jiang Xing calmly picked up the clingy beauty and placed him on the sofa. He told him, "This soft chair is called a sofa."

Lin Qingyu said, "I'll kept that in mind." Michelin and sofa. He learned two new words today.

Lin Qingyu seemed completely unaware of his subconsciously acting spoiled just now. His attention was still all on the TV. Jiang Xing sat down beside him and watched TV with him. The air conditioner was turned on a little low, Lin

Qingyu covered his shoulders with a thin blanket and automatically leaned his head on Jiang Xing's shoulders.

Lin Qingyu's movements were so natural. It seemed that they'd done something similar countless times before.

But the problem was, he didn't remember. Lin Qingyu's casual words and actions were huge physical and mental stimulus to him.

This really made him look so naive. It's so unfair.

Jiang Xing was filled with so much grief and indignation that he didn't even register what was on TV. Until he heard Lin Qingyu ask, "Jiang Xing, what's that?"

Jiang Xing glanced at the screen, where a gunfight between police and gangsters was playing out. "Those are handguns, firearms. They use

gunpowder to fire bullets. One of the most common weapons in modern times."

"Weapon?" Lin Qingyu looked at the gun in the protagonist's hand and watched as he knocked down an enemy in the blink of an eye, "It seems to be more powerful than Qingyun Jiuzhou Spear."

"That's right. Times have changed, My Lord."

"And how does that compare to my little poisonous snake?"

"The gun is probably more powerful. I'm guessing your little poisonous snake would still need some time for its poison to take effect."

Lin Qingyu's eyes twinkled with excitement. "It's that powerful? I want it."

Jiang Xing couldn't help laughing. "That's a really tall order. Here, only the police can have guns. This way, it'll be faster for them to catch and subdue the bad guys."

"What kind of crime did that man commit for the police to catch him?"

Jiang Xing could only guess the plot based on fragmented details. "It seems he seduced a minor or something."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "So it's against the law to seduce minors? And if you do,

you'll be caught by the police with guns?"

"More or less."

Lin Qingyu fell into deep thought. After a long time, he sat up slowly, moved his head away from Jiang Xing's shoulder and shifted a bit away. "Jiang Xing, I actually lied to you."

"Ah?"

When we were in the Dayu, we weren't husband and wife, but brothers with different surnames, sworn brothers."

Jiang Xing: "…"

"Truly, we made an oath with blood and swore before heaven and earth."

What Lin Qingyu said was true. When Jiang Xing was still Lu Wancheng, he'd clamored every day for them to call each other 'brother'. Later on, he acquiesced and they held a ceremony to be sworn brothers.

Jiang Xing was silent for nearly a minute. Then he suddenly smiled. "Come on, it's too late for you to say this now." He leaned back on the sofa, looking lazy. He raised his hand and touched Lin Qingyu's cheek with his fingertips, "Although I haven't remembered everything, I can feel it—I'm certain of it. You're my wife."

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Extra Story 11

It only took Lin Qingyu half a day to learn how to use most of the functions of the mobile phone; though his typing speed was no match for the average teenager. Jiang Xing suggested that he use voice-to-text conversion. Lin Qingyu spoke Mandarin in a very standard manner and his speed of speech was also just right making it so that there were almost no errors in recognition.

Aside from communication, a phone's biggest function is for entertainment. Jiang Xing said, "Shall I download a few games for you to play? Since you are

still a novice, I will teach you how to play Anipop first and then I'll teach you how to play Jungler, given your personality I think you suit Jungler best."

Lin Qingyu said, "This matter of playing the jungle will be discussed later. The most important thing now is that you teach me how to search and look up information on my mobile phone."

Jiang Xing asked, "What do you want to look up?"

"A lot."

Jiang Xing taught Lin Qingyu to surf the Internet and Lin Qingyu once again fell into a state of ecstasy. Jiang Xing also had something to check so he sat next to Lin Qingyu and while looking things up, he fed Lin Qingyu bites of after-meal fruit.

He didn't know how long Lin Qingyu was going to stay in modern times. According to Lin Qingyu, if they wished to return to the Dayu, it would depend on a man named Xu Junyuan. In modern society, it could be said that without an ID card, even moving around would be difficult.

So here comes the question, how does a black householder get an ID card?

The procedures listed online were complex and complicated and Jiang Xing grew dizzy just looking at the never-ending list of relevant policies. He decided to ask his grandfather's omnipotent assistant for help. He made a phone call to explain his request and the assistant readily agreed. She told him

to take the black householder to accomplish the formalities once the holidays were over but to leave the rest to her.

When he came back from his phone call, he saw that Lin Qingyu had gone to the balcony. He was facing the Pearl River, his long hair was buffeted by the winds, his fair face carrying a dignified expression.

Jiang Xing asked, “Qingyu, are you alright?”

“I’m fine.” Lin Qingyu, seemingly weak and weary, passed the phone to Jiang Xing. “The girl who helped me find you last time, please add her on WeChat for me.”

Lin Qingyu’s mobile phone interface was still on his browser and there was a

series of search records on it:

[Is a gunshot wound fatal and how to heal it.]

[You can't do anything to minors, restrictions on minors]

[Is it illegal to have a relationship with a minor?]

[What is the best medical institution in the country?]

[Where can I buy poison?]

[Can I keep poisonous snakes?]

[Criminal Law]

Jiang Xing: …

He now had a guess as to why the villainous beauty looked as though he'd suffered such a serious setback. Sorry, we really can't poison people here.

Jiang Xing added Ke Tang and returned the phone to Lin Qingyu. Ke Tang sent several cute cat emoticons, Lin Qingyu pressed the voice button to reply. "Thank you for helping me find my hus-…for helping me find Jiang Xing."

Jiang Xing had a premonition that the wife he'd just acquired was about to fly away. He tactfully changed the subject. "Qingyu, do you want to go out for a

stroll?"

"Not really." Lin Qingyu said softly, "I'm a little tired."

"You don't want to drink milk tea?"

Lin Qingyu hesitated for a moment. "I do."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Then I'll call the driver to pick us up."

Lin Qingyu was not very happy. "But I want to be alone with you, without other people around."

Jiang Xing was troubled. "Then what should I do? I don't know how to drive and I can't wrong you by making you ride a bike with me, that'd be so tiring." And Lin Qingyu didn't know how to ride a bike anyway. This luxury apartment was located in the most prosperous area of the city, within walking distance to the commercial center. But how can he let the ancient beauty walk with him? He had to take Lin Qingyu to experience the convenience of modern transportation.

So, the property's steward received Jiang Xing's call for help once again, "Can you rent me a scooter?"

Lin Qingyu went out wearing Jiang Xing's clothes and shoes. The shoes were from Jiang Xing's junior high school days but they were just the right size for Lin Qingyu and although the clothes were a little loose, they were decent. With

his mask on and his long hair loose, he looked like a girl in her boyfriend's clothes.

Lin Qingyu followed Jiang Xing downstairs, where the steward had already prepared the electric scooter and helmets. The steward repeatedly confirmed with Jiang Xing: "You really don't want me to call a car for you?"

"No, this is more convenient——Qingyu, look up. Put on this helmet."

Lin Qingyu was still chatting with Ke Tang: [Let's talk later, I'm going to ride a scooter.]

Ke Tang: […You're going to ride what?]

Lin Qingyu: [A scooter.]

Ke Tang: [Huhuhu, can't your husband take you on something bigger? What if you two don't fit?]

This car called a "scooter" was indeed a tad bit small for the two grown men and Lin Qingyu couldn't help wondering if it could even support their

combined weight.

Jiang Xing patted the back seat of the scooter. “Come on.”

Lin Qingyu hesitated. “Will this be better than a car?”

“Of course.” Jiang Xing said with a smile, “You’ll never get stuck in traffic on this thing. Isn’t that good enough?”

Lin Qingyu straddled up and clasped his sides tightly with both hands. Jiang Xing said, “Put your arms around my waist and hold on tight.”

Lin Qingyu remained motionless and asked, “Does hugging your waist count as seducing you?”

“No, it’s called good safety awareness. Not only will you not be caught by the police, but you will also be praised.”

Only then did Lin Qingyu hug Jiang Xing tightly from behind, pressing his face against his back. The scooter started to move. Though the speed varied greatly from a car, it was surprisingly refreshing and comfortable. The trees on both sides gradually receded as the two of them left the community and came onto the public streets. The breeze blew away the summer heat.

When they arrived by the commercial area’s sidewalk, Jiang Xing parked his scooter and took off Lin Qingyu’s helmet for him. Lin Qingyu’s long hair had been pressed flat by the helmet and blown into a mess by the wind. The top of

his head was about to puff up. Jiang Xing hid his smile behind his mask and smoothed Lin Qingyu's hair with his hands.

Lin Qingyu let Jiang Xing fix his hair and asked, "Where's the milk tea?"

Nowadays, almost every street had a milk tea shop. Jiang Xing chose a popular brand and spent the huge sum of 70 yuan to buy two cups of their signature milk tea. While paying, he demonstrated to Lin Qingyu step by step how to use mobile phones to make mobile payments.

Jiang Xing remembered that there was no money in Lin Qingyu's WeChat, so turning around slightly, he made a fund transfer.

After a while, Lin Qingyu received a message: [Jiang Xing has transferred 5,200 yuan to you]

Lin Qingyu looked up at Jiang Xing: "What does this mean?"

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Milk tea money for my wife."

The milk tea this time was indeed much better than the last time's; although not by a hundred times, at least ten times. The two walked down the street holding a cup of milk tea each. Even though they were wearing masks, they still attracted looks from many passers-by because of their height and temperament. Especially Lin Qingyu, who would take off his mask to drink

milk tea from time to time. As soon as he showed the other half of his face, passers-by would realize that this was not some young couple.

When passing by a small goods store, Jiang Xing, seeing that most of the customers were girls, suggested, “Qingyu, let’s go in and have a look?”

Lin Qingyu, not knowing what kind of shop it was, simply nodded, “Alright.”

As soon as he entered the shop, Lin Qingyu smelled a strange fragrance. He found the source of the smell, which turned out to be a row of scented candles — he didn’t know the similarities and differences between the fragrances here and the Dayu’s.

Jiang Xing found the accessories area by himself. He didn’t understand anything about girls’ things so he asked the clerk for help, “My wife’s hair is too long and it always gets wet when she washes her face. Apart from a rubber band is there anything that can help with that?”

He asked openly and earnestly, with bright and beautiful eyes, so that the clerk showed 100% enthusiasm and replied, “How about buying a hairpin, or a headband? Our cat ears headband is one of our bestsellers. It’s…”

As Lin Qingyu was studying the ingredients of the candles, he felt someone approach him from behind. He thought it was Jiang Xing, but when he turned around, he saw a strange man. The man combed back his shiny black hair and

grinned at him. “Pretty girl, are you here by yourself? You’re so tall, are you a model?”

Lin Qingyu frowned in disgust. Seems there are Disciples of Greasiness in every world.

Intentionally or unintentionally, the man was fiddling with his car keys. “Let’s add each other on WeChat. Next time, I’ll treat you to coffee.”

There was a girl standing behind the man, her eyes were filled with disgust and impatience. “Ge, that’s enough. Can’t you tell when someone doesn’t want to talk to you?”

Unwilling to give up, the man took out his trump card. “Pretty girl, I’m 1.84 meters tall, a little taller than you.”

Was cursing someone out illegal here?

Before Lin Qingyu could tell him to ‘take a hike’, a baseball cap was pressed down onto his head.

“I’m sorry, handsome.” Jiang Xing pulled down the brim of the cap to cover Lin Qingyu’s face and said casually, “You’re talking to my wife right now.”

The man saw that Jiang Xing looked like a student, so he flashed him his car

keys again. He said, “Maybe your girlfriend, but not your wife.”

Jiang Xing smiled politely, “My wife.”

Although they didn’t get a certificate, they did have a matchmaker’s introduction and three matches and six engagements and that makes him his wife.

But in the eyes of men, a high school student with a wife is like a kid playing house. “Alright, fine, your wife. But I just want to make friends with your wife. Don’t get me wrong, Xiao Shuai Ge.”

Jiang Xing saw the man’s car keys and silently took out his electric scooter keys. The man let out a light cough to hide his happiness at his win. He wanted

to say something, but the girl standing beside him held him back. “Let’s go, I’ve finished shopping——”

The girl used all sorts of excuses and finally pulled the man out. The man felt that he had lost face and asked his sister, “Why did you stop me? Are you afraid of some scooter-riding student couple?”

“Don’t make a fool of yourself.” The girl said contemptuously, “Do you know how much that boy’s shoes cost?”

“Just how much can a pair of shoes cost?”

The girl snorted coldly, “The money you paid for that second-hand BMW is probably just barely enough to buy him two pairs. And you want to hook up with his girlfriend? Lol, what face do you have?”

The man sneered and said, “If he had that much money then why take a scooter? Those shoes must be fake.”

“Oh, get over yourself. You think they’re take a scooter because that’s the only thing they can afford. Haven’t you heard that bringing out your girlfriend to experience life is the latest thing? Even riding scooters is fun.”

Lin Qingyu looked at the man’s departing back and said two words to himself. “…Criminal law.”

Jiang Xing’s forehead twitched. “I ask the Lord Prime Minister to be

magnanimous with his patience."

There were few boys with long hair and Lin Qingyu's brows and eyes looked delicate. It wasn't surprising that that wretched man would mistake him for a girl.

After walking out of the shop, Jiang Xing suddenly laughed and said, "Qingyu, I…I want to hold hands with you."

Jiang Xing's tone was full of youthful nervousness, which reminded Lin Qingyu of the years when they were still in the Nan'an Hou's mansion.

Who could refuse Jiang Xing when he was like this?

Lin Qingyu looked left and right then stretched out his hand. "Alright."

Two slender hands were clasped together. On their other hand, the two were still holding their unfinished milk tea. Flushed faces were hidden under the masks and even though their palms are hot and sweaty, they did not let go. They were no different from other young couples in love strolling along the street.

When Lin Qingyu saw the traffic policeman directing traffic at the intersection, he immediately let go of Jiang Xing's hand and walked forward

quickly, leaving Jiang Xing alone in confusion. At this moment, Jiang Xing had the impression of being caught by the head teacher doing PDA.

Lin Qingyu took two steps and then looked back at Jiang Xing, urging with his eyes: Are you not following?

Jiang Xing didn't know whether to laugh or cry, he chased after Lin Qingyu and took Lin Qingyu's hand again. "Don't be nervous, Baobei. At most, this is just puppy love. The policeman uncle won't arrest you."

Actually, it probably can't technically count as puppy love. According to Lin Qingyu, his actual age has already past the legal age of marriage.

Lin Qingyu turned thoughtful. He took out his mobile phone and searched: [Is puppy love against the law?]

Answer: Puppy love is not illegal, but students are advised to focus on their studies. We do not advocate puppy love, especially during the all-important third year of high school! Reject puppy love! Start with me!

Lin Qingyu: …

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Extra Story 12

In the evening, the two had a hot pot meal. Lin Qingyu had also eaten hot pot in the Dayu and didn't think there was anything new about it. The only thing

that he found strange was that before the meal, Jiang Xing soaked their bowls and chopsticks in hot tea, as if performing some kind of mysterious ceremony.

The waiter thoughtfully brought them aprons and oil-proof bags for their phones. There was even a hair tie for Lin Qingyu so that he could tie his hair up.

“Wait a minute.” Jiang Xing took out a bear hair tie, “I bought it for you, use mine.”

Lin Qingyu was not satisfied. “Why is it a bear?”

Jiang Xing said, “Because I couldn’t find a little snake. You can use the little bear first and I’ll buy a little snake hair tie online for you later.”

Lin Qingyu took the hair tie. “That’s not necessary. I’ll just make do with this.”

Lin Qingyu tied his long hair with the bear hair tie and then sat waiting for Jiang Xing to feed him. Jiang Xing mixed a dipping sauce for him, swearing

that it was the Jiang Family's secret ancestral recipe and that if Lin Qingyu hadn't been his wife, he wouldn't have passed it on to an outsider.

Lin Qingyu, still worrying about the dangers of puppy love, hesitantly said, "You're underage. It seems that you cannot have a wife."

Jiang Xing was forced to compromise. "Alright, not a wife but what about a boyfriend?"

It was the first time Lin Qingyu has heard this form of address and asked in confusion, "Boyfriend?"

Jiang Xing explained the meaning of boyfriend to Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu said, "Very well. From now on in your hometown, you will be my boyfriend."

Jiang Xing heaved a sigh, "The more you live, the more you regress."

The two of them were halfway through eating when guests came to occupy the next table. It was a family of three. The dad was pushing the baby carriage and

a little boy about a year old was sitting inside, looking at them curiously with big round eyes.

Jiang Xing stared at the baby carriage, his hand, holding his chopsticks with vegetables, hanging in the air. His eyes slackened. Why did he feel like he'd been in a stroller that needed to be pushed… a wheelchair?

Suddenly, Jiang Xing said in a low voice, "Damn, Qingyu."

Lin Qingyu's hand shook and the beef ball he had picked up with great difficulty fell back into the pot. "What is it? You scared me."

"I remembered." Jiang Xing was a little excited, "I remembered that I went to the Dayu."

Lin Qingyu was momentarily stunned and forgot all about the beef ball. "Really?"

Jiang Xing nodded excitedly. "So I really didn't die, and was reborn as General Gu?"

Lin Qingyu felt that something was a bit wrong. "What do you mean by that?"

"Uh, I did remember but I didn't remember completely." Jiang Xing spread his hands, "I just remembered what happened when I was Lu Wancheng. I still

haven't remembered those things you told me happened when I was Gu Fuzhou."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Could it be that the recovery of his memories will come by the lifetime? First Lu Wancheng, then Gu Fuzhou, and finally Xiao Li?

Jiang Xing was immersed in his memories. "So, after I became Gu Fuzhou, I chased after you? Did I confess to you?" Jiang Xing couldn't help sighing, "They weren't wrong when they said I showed such promise. A display worthy of me."

Lin Qingyu looked at Jiang Xing silently. No matter how much memory has been restored, Jiang Xing was still Jiang Xing. His nature has not changed at

all. In just a few days, he recovered his memory of his previous life. It won't take long for him to fully recover.

Lin Qingyu wasn't too worried. He still even got it in him to joke with Jiang Xing, "You think that it'd been up to you? Learn the "Book of Songs" by heart first."

Jiang Xing's smile gradually disappeared: "…No, don't tell me that you were the one who chased me? You were the one who confessed to me? I was that much of a loser in love? No, I don't believe it."

Lin Qingyu continued to enjoy his beef balls and said lightly. "I don't know. Maybe you should remember it for yourself."

Jiang Xing's memory only returned up to the night when Lu Wancheng died of illness. He was full of curiosity and thirst for knowledge about what happened

later. He asked while cooking Lin Qingyu's tripe. "Didn't you still like girls? Why would you marry my second reincarnation?"

"Why do you think?"

"I didn't embarrass General Gu, did I?"

"No."

"What happened to the rest of the Nan'an Hou Mansion?"

"They're basically alive."

"What about Shen Huaishi?"

"He's doing fine."

Jiang Xing paused for a minute, as if wanting to confirm, then asked, "Qingyu, do you really like me?"

"En."

Jiang Xing rested his chin on his hand and looked at the ponytail-ed great beauty opposite him. "What do you like about me?"

Lin Qingyu raised his eyes and glanced at him. "I like that you look good, you

will always be eighteen years old."

Jiang Xing didn't know whether he believed it or not. He said with a smile, "I love this reason—then when did you fall in love with me?"

Lin Qingyu didn't give an answer immediately. When did he fall in love with Jiang Xing? Was it during the Lantern Festival of that year? Or when he married Gu Fuzhou? Or was it even earlier?

Perhaps as early as when they were in the Nan'an Hou's Mansion, his love for Lu Wancheng had already sprouted, but at that time he hadn't known what it was. He only knew that Lu Wancheng was bound to die, even if he sensed his feelings, he didn't dare go through with it.

Jiang Xing, who now only had his memories of that life, in a mysterious was making up for the regrets while he'd been Lu Wancheng.

"Qingyu?"

Lin Qingyu came back to his senses, and was about to answer but discovered something important, "You're overcooking the tripe."

In order to gain more value from the hair tie Jiang Xing had bought him Lin Qingyu kept his long hair for a few more days. Jiang Xing took out his dusty

camera and took picture after picture of Lin Qingyu's face; whether it was a picture worthy moment or not, it didn't matter.

Lin Qingyu was wearing the cat ears headband and he had just finished washing his face when he heard a voice, "Qingyu, turn around."

Lin Qingyu's face suddenly appeared in the viewfinder. Under the dim and warm light in the bathroom, his face seemed to emit a soft glow.

Jiang Xing stared in a daze and forgot to press the shutter button. He said like a sigh, "…fuck."

Lin Qingyu took off the cat-ears headband and let his long hair fall down. "High school students shouldn't swear so much. If you've taken enough pictures, I'll cut my hair short today. Long hair here is inconvenient after all." He didn't want his gender to be mistaken every time he went out.

Jiang Xing had no objections to this. Lin Qingyu with long hair was amazing, but he was also looking forward to Lin Qingyu's short hair. "Okay, I'll help you find a reliable Mr. Tony."

His Mr. Tony had opened a studio and attained the legendary title of chief stylist. In his hands, Jiang Xing's hair has never come out wrong. But Lin

Qingyu didn't think this meant much. After all, even when Jiang Xing cut his hair haphazardly, he still came out looking really good.

After heaping tons of praise onto Lin Qingyu's face and hair, Tony asked, "What kind of hairstyle would Shuai Ge like?"

Jiang Xing said, "Do you have any suggestions?"

"Shuai Ge has such fair skin. We can try dyeing it a light color to match his facial features. We'll go with the aloof and noble son style, which also matches his temperament." Tony said, exaggerating, "To be honest, the moment I saw him, it made me want to kneel down and pay him my respects."

Jiang Xing asked Lin Qingyu, "Do you want to dye your hair?"

Lin Qingyu said, "That's not necessary. I don't want to attract too much attention."

Tony smiled and said, "That'll probably be a bit difficult."

Jiang Xing said, "He doesn't want the cold and noble son look. If you can, just try to make him look simple and open. Oh, by the way, can you cut a lock of his hair as a souvenir for me?"

Lin Qingyu's long hair, which he'd been growing for twenty years, was cut short for the first time. Without the cover of his long hair, the contours of his face became more distinct, which somewhat magnified his delicate facial

features. Tony cut him some bangs and they covered his brows a little. If he bows his head slightly, it can somewhat slow down the swift and fierce attack of his good looks.

Lin Qingyu looked at himself in the mirror. It looked both familiar and unfamiliar. The face was the same face but his hair has gone from long to short and it gave off a different feel; a little less luxurious and a little more refreshing.

A hand was gently placed on Lin Qingyu's hair. Lin Qingyu looked up at Jiang Xing, waiting for his evaluation. Mr. Tony on the side was full of praise. He kept calling him good-looking, dignified, handsome, and beautiful. All oft repeated things.

Jiang Xing locked eyes with him through the mirror and he held his gaze for a couple of seconds. He then looked away first and said with a smile, "You look bewitching, Baobei. Now, I won't be able to pin down your hair in the future."

When Jiang Xing was signing to pay the bill, from the corner of his eye, he saw Tony and Lin Qingyu chatting for a while. The two left the studio and before Jiang Xing could ask, Lin Qingyu gave Jiang Xing the business card that Tony

had given him. It was a business card of a scout from an entertainment company. It wasn't surprising that Tony would know someone in that circle.

With the business card between his fingers, Jiang Xing flung it like a playing card straight into the trash can by the sidewalk. "Qingyu, when I go back to school, I won't be with you 24 hours a day anymore. You…"

Lin Qingyu knew what he was going to say, and said: "It's okay, I have a mobile phone, an air conditioner and milk tea. You can go to school with peace of mind."

Jiang Xing had no choice but to accept it. "Seems you've stumbled onto the true meaning of a modern man's life."

On the last day of the holiday, they didn't go back to Zhujiang New Town but went to Jiang Xing's apartment near the school. In order to sleep an extra half an hour each morning, Jiang Xing usually stayed here save for the holidays. The houses near the school were all of a certain age and its outside appearance couldn't compare to the large apartments beside the Pearl River. The area was also on the small side. But the interior design wasn't the least bit sloppy. The apartment was only a five-minute walk from Jiang Xing's high school. Even the ten minute breaks between classes would be enough for Jiang Xing to climb over the wall, get back home and take a look at his wife.

Jiang Xing bought and downloaded all the literary classics of Chinese medicine that he could find onto the e-book reader. He then signed up to all the video streaming sites and finally he personally taught Lin Qingyu how to

play games. “If you still feel bored, just send me a WeChat message and I will ask for leave to come back to accompany you.”

Lin Qingyu was playing the game and said absent-mindedly, “Alright.”

Jiang Xing thought about it from every angle. In the end, he still couldn’t bear to let his beautiful wife stay at home alone. Half-truthfully, he said, “Qingyu, how about I drop out of school? I want to stay with you. In any case, when we return to the Dayu, it seems like this diploma won’t be of any use.”

Lin Qingyu was fighting in a team battle and didn’t even raise his head. “Not necessarily, nothing learned is ever wasted. If you successfully complete your studies, at least, the Dayu’s monarch will be a high school graduate instead of a dropout.”

Jiang Xing sighed. “Okay, then you continue playing. I have to get some things done.”

Lin Qingyu asked casually, “What do you need to do?”

Jiang Xing was full of resentment. “I need to cram. I’ve got to finish my homework.”

Lin Qingyu: “…”

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Extra Story 13

Jiang Xing wrote not a single word of his homework the entire seven day National Day holidays. Lin Qingyu watched as he opened the schoolbag that had been lying in the corner the entire time and took out a large stack of exercise sheets. Judging by the thickness, there must be at least twenty pages.

Lin Qingyu asked, “How long does it take you finish one exercise sheet?”

Jiang Xing took off the cap of his pen. Twirling the ballpoint pen, he said casually, “At least half an hour.”

After a rough calculation, he concluded Jiang Xing might not be able to complete his homework even if he stays up all night. Lin Qingyu was reminded of those days when Jiang Xing had been buried under scrolls and scrolls of official reports. It was both funny and infuriating. “If you knew you

had such a difficult task, why did you delay doing it until now? What have you been doing the past six days?"

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows. "How about you tell me what I've been doing?"

"Don't blame this on me." Lin Qingyu immediately exposed the truth, "Even without me around, you would definitely have still delayed doing it until the last day."

"Damn it." Jiang Xing randomly pulled out a math exercise sheet, glanced at the question and wrote down the answer. "I'm in such a miserable state, yet you still won't let me blame you."

Lin Qingyu said coldly. "Of course not."

In the Dayu, Lin Qingyu would occasionally stay up late with Jiang Xing to review reports. It never occurred to him that there would be a day when, despite the absence of reports, he would still stay up late with Jiang Xing to do his homework.

Inside the study, the desk lamp was turned on and on the table, were two cups of milk tea. One was doing homework while the other was playing games. They did their own things quietly, without disturbing the other. Jiang Xing finished an exercise sheet, he dropped his pen and looked at Lin Qingyu. He saw Lin Qingyu, with headphones on, pick up his milk tea to take a sip. But

because his eyes couldn't leave the phone screen, his lips were met with air. He tried twice before successfully catching the straw.

Jiang Xing chuckled. He was thinking of going over to Lin Qingyu to cling to him when he heard Lin Qingyu ask, "What does a Magic Spike mean? My teammates are asking if I can fill in as a Magic Spike."

In the game, a Magic Spike refers to a mage who can be an assassin. Usually, the level of operation needed to play this type is higher than for other types of mages. Lin Qingyu had just started to play tower defense games; Jiang Xing has only taught him two or three easy-to-play heroes, enough for a low-level newcomer.

"Don't pay attention to them." Jiang Xing said, "Just play as you know how to play."

Lin Qingyu said, "I also want to try other things." Saying so, he chose a hero who had complicated combos and somewhat complex machanics.

Jiang Xing couldn't stop him, Lin Qingyu had already locked onto the hero. Jiang Xing hesitated to speak, "If your teammates curse at you, let me help you play."

Lin Qingyu said, "No need, you can just help me curse back at them."

Jiang Xing stopped doing his homework. He went to Lin Qingyu's side to watch him play. Four minutes into the game, a wave of small team battles

erupted between the two sides. Lin Qingyu successfully took off with an impressive combo and took first blood.

Jiang Xing was a little confused. “This…” There was a high probability that it was merely a coincidence.

Seeing Lin Qingyu successfully pull off three consecutive moves, Jiang Xing became more and more confused. He couldn’t help asking, “Qingyu, have you practiced this hero before?”

“No, it’s my first time playing.”

“Then how did you manage to take off?”

Lin Qingyu asked, puzzled, “Well, it was explained pretty clearly in the skill description, wasn’t it? If you want to take off then you just play according to the description.”

Jiang Xing was silent for three seconds. He then smiled and said, “Yes, yes, yes. It’s that simple. You go on then. I’ll continue answering my homework.”

Jiang Xing had procastinaed on too much homework and he didn’t finish until early in the morning. Lin Qingyu was first to give up and he fell asleep lying on the table. Jiang Xing picked him up, carrying him bridal style. He wanted to

take him to sleep in the master bedroom before going back to continue on his fight but seeing Lin Qingyu's sleeping face, he felt a little bit reluctant.

Starting tomorrow, he won't be able to be with Lin Qingyu 24 hours a day.

So, he moved his work from the study to the bedroom. He emptied the things from the bedside table and turned it into his temporary desk. He sat cross-legged on the floor, with the bed beside him — Lin Qingyu was sleeping next to him.

In the middle of the night, Lin Qingyu opened his eyes. Half-asleep, he saw that the bedside light was still on and called out, "…Jiang Xing?"

Jiang Xing immediately stopped writing. "Did I wake you up?"

Lin Qingyu was sleepy. "Why haven't you finished yet?"

"Soon." Jiang Xing patted Lin Qingyu's back like he was putting a child to sleep, "You go to sleep first."

Lin Qingyu nodded and closed his eyes obediently. Just like that, Jiang Xing gently patted Lin Qingyu's back with his left hand as he wrote down the answers one by one with his right.

Jiang Xing struggled until three o'clock in the morning when he finally finish his homework. He went to bed weakly and lay down beside Lin Qingyu. With

his last bit of willpower, he adjusted the alarm clock to go off half an hour earlier.

Lin Qingyu went to bed late last night and so, he woke up late the next day. When he woke up, Jiang Xing was already packing his things, looking sluggish and sleepy.

“Are you going to school already?” Lin Qingyu asked.

“Yeah. I’ve already bought breakfast and put it on the dining table, remember to eat it.” Jiang Xing hurriedly stuffed his textbooks and exercise sheets into his schoolbag. Although the alarm clock had gone off on time, he still couldn’t help staying in bed for ten minutes more. He then went to buy breakfast for Lin Qingyu. He was most probably going to be late. “Auntie will come to clean and cook at noon. I’ve already told her that you’re at home so you can just tell her what you want to eat.”

Lin Qingyu nodded in response. “Alright, you better get going.”

Jiang Xing fastened his schoolbag on his back and rushed to the door. He stopped suddenly, turned back, and threw himself on the bed. Lin Qingyu

groaned, pressed to the bed by the weight of Jiang Xing and his schoolbag. Lin Qingyu asked, “What are you doing?”

Jiang Xing leaned over and pressed a kiss on Lin Qingyu’s forehead. “I want to kiss you before leaving.”

Lin Qingyu was slightly taken aback.

“Fuck, I’m really going to be late.” Jiang Xing ran away after kissing him, “I’ll be going, Qingyu.”

Lin Qingyu raised his hand and touched his forehead. Jiang Gongzi… No, it should be Classmate Jiang. Once again going out with his first love, he was still very reserved — or, panicky might be a better word.

Jiang Xing’s “Auntie” was a middle-aged woman who worked quickly and talked little. She would come only at lunch time to cook and while she’s there, she would clean up as well. For most of the time, Lin Qingyu was alone at home. He didn’t feel bored though. A modern medical book was enough to keep him occupied for the rest of the day.

Lin Qingyu was so immersed in his book that he didn’t even play much. After an unknown amount of time, the sound of a key turning came from the living

room. Lin Qingyu glanced at the time. It was still too early for Jiang Xing to get off school. Did the Auntie come in early?

When he came to the living room, before he could see who had come, he was hugged and knocked back a couple of steps.

“Qingyu…!”

It was Jiang Xing.

Jiang Xing was wearing his school uniform, panting slightly. It was apparent that he had run all the way home from school.

He hugged Lin Qingyu tightly. Confused, Lin Qingyu asked, “What’s the matter with you?”

Jiang Xing said in a low voice, “I sent you so many messages and even called you. Why didn’t you answer?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Sorry, I didn’t see it.”

His phone was in the living room and turned to silent. He hasn’t yet developed the habit of carrying his mobile phone with him all the time and looking at it

whenever he had nothing to do.

Jiang Xing mumbled, “You’re really going to scare me to death.”

“What’s so scary about this?” Lin Qingyu pushed Jiang Xing away, walked to one side and picked up his phone, “When I see it, naturally, I’ll reply to you.”

Jiang Xing sighed, “Qingyu, please do me a favor. Please do not not answer my calls, please do not not reply to my messages. I know it’s unrealistic for you to reply in seconds but check your phone at least every hour — or even every two hours, okay? I hadn’t heard from you for so long that I couldn’t focus in class.”

Lin Qingyu flipped through the messages sent by Jiang Xing. Since Jiang Xing arrived at the school, he sent several messages every so often.

[Qingyu, I’m in the classroom. As soon as I entered, I was stopped by number two. He asked me how many exercise sheets I’d done during the holiday. He

said that in addition to the twenty sets assigned by the teacher, he answered ten more. I feel like he's trying to screw me over.]

[This "Li Sao" is a bit difficult to memorize… Worried.]

[Hello? Is anyone there?]

[Qingyu? ? ?]

[Have mercy on this child…]

Lin Qingyu said, "What do you mean so long? It's only been two hours."

Jiang Xing choked. "Two hours isn't long enough?"

Despite how well Lin Qingyu has been adapting to modern society, he was a man from ancient times after all. Without getting a response from Lin Qingyu, Jiang Xing's imagination would inevitably run wild. He worried about whether Lin Qingyu went out and got into trouble. He worried about if Lin Qingyu encountered any difficulties at home. He even worried that Lin Qingyu might just disappear.

Lin Qingyu said, "Even when we were in the Dayu, we couldn't just let Xiao Songzi run to and fro delivering messages all the time."

Jiang Xing shook his head. "It's different. You don't belong to this world, you came here because of me. If you disappeared suddenly, I would think…" Jiang

Xing laughed at himself, “I would think that you went back to the Dayu alone. On my way back here, I was even wondering if I would need to get hit by a car again before I could go back and find you. If that’s the case, then I can only…”

Lin Qingyu’s face changed slightly and he interrupted him, voice cold, “Don’t say such stupid things.”

Jiang Xing complained, “That’s why you can’t scare me like this.”

Lin Qingyu suddenly realized that Jiang Xing, like him, was also afraid of being separated and losing the other. And this was after just recovering the memory of his first life. Jiang Xing has only experienced their separation once. How would Jiang Xing feel once he remembers them being separated a second time? Even if he did manage to return in the end, faced with a Lin Qingyu who had been on the verge of collapse, Jiang Xing still had to reason with him,

comfort him, coax him and give him enough sense of security——And Jiang Xing was even a year younger than him.

Perhaps, Jiang Xing was just as affected as he was about their repeated separations only that he never showed it.

Lin Qingyu adjusted the collar of Jiang Xing's school uniform and said softly, "Okay, from now on I will try to promptly reply to your messages."

Just try?

Jiang Xing was still not satisfied. He grabbed Lin Qingyu's shoulder and said with a serious expression, "Qingyu, here in our place, it is against the law not to reply to your boyfriend's messages within two hours."

Lin Qingyu was silent for a moment and then asked, "Do I look that easy to deceive?"

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Extra Story 14

Although it wasn't illegal not to reply to your boyfriend's messages, in order to give him sufficient sense of security so that he could study with peace of mind, Lin Qingyu worked hard to develop the habit of carrying his mobile phone

around with him. He would even occasionally take the initiative to send messages to Jiang Xing, sharing what he'd seen and heard in his daily life.

So, during recess, Jiang Xing changed his normal routine and instead of lying on his desk to catch up on sleep, he happily chatted with Lin Qingyu on WeChat.

Today, Lin Qingyu said that he wanted to go to the pharmacy. As soon as he entered the pharmacy, Lin Qingyu was like a fish in a river. Just from the messages he sent, Jiang Xing could imagine how excited he was.

Lin Qingyu took many photos for him, most of which were medicines. A few weren't medicines but drew Lin Qingyu's interest anyway.

Lin Qingyu: [Jiang Xing, look at this.]

Jiang Xing clicked on the photo Lin Qingyu sent and sat up straight.

Jiang Xing: […Baobei, listen to me and put that down first.]

Lin Qingyu: [I want to buy it and study it at home.]

Jiang Xing: [Buy, buy, buy—or would you like me to buy it for you after

school?]

Lin Qingyu: [No need, I can buy it now.]

Jiang Xing was worried that Lin Qingyu wouldn't have enough money, so he made three money transfers worth 5200 yuan each. There was no message

from Lin Qingyu. He must have gone to pay the bill. Jiang Xing clicked on the photo and looked at it again. He couldn't help thinking.

Jiang Xing: [By the way, the Dayu probably doesn't have these things.]

Lin Qingyu: [There aren't any among the common people. But some small western countries have given something similar as tributes to the Dayu.]

Jiang Xing: [So, did I use it when I slept with you before?]

Lin Qingyu: [No need.]

Jiang Xing: [Fuck, I'm such a scumbag.]

Lin Qingyu: [?]

Jiang Xing: [Only scumbags don't glove up.]

Lin Qingyu: [It has nothing to do with you, I like it when you come in straight.]

Jiang Xing, wearing his high school uniform, sitting by the window in his classroom, staring at the phone screen, felt his body was getting hotter and hotter. He could no longer remain clam. — Why did he have to talk about this with Lin Qingyu during the break?

Jiang Xing went to the water dispenser, filled a glass of cold water and drank it in one gulp. When he came back, he saw that Lin Qingyu had withdrawn his

last message.

Lin Qingyu: [I forgot for a moment that you're still not yet an adult here. In the future, don't ask me about our past in bed. I might get accused of seducing a high schooler.]

Just as Jiang Xing was about to reply, a pair of his hands slammed down on his desk, pressing down the English test paper that had just been handed out. A

boy with glasses and a crew cut glared at him—this was the second in their class, Chen Zihao.

Chen Zihao said through gritted teeth, “Why?!”

Jiang Xing put away his phone and asked, “What?”

“I made ten more sets of exercises than you did during the National Day holiday,” Chen Zihao was furious, “So why is my score still lower than yours?!”

Jiang Xing glanced at Chen Zihao’s English test paper. His score was only two points lower. “I guess I’m just lucky.”

Chen Zihao roared, “How can you be so lucky every single damn time!”

“That’s because Heaven rewards the diligent…”

Chen Zihao was furious. “Cut your bullshit, you’ve never ever tried hard!”

Jiang Xing said with a smile, “You can’t say that. You don’t see me when I’m working hard. It’s only in school that I’m lazy. As a matter of fact, I study until

very late at home. Staying up until three or four o'clock in the morning is a common occurrence. "

Chen Zihao was stunned and then instantly suspicious. "Is that true?"

Jiang Xing appeared very sincere. "It's true. The reason why I don't study hard in school is to put on an image." Jiang Xing patted the boy on the shoulder, "You're too anxious, buddy. Take it easy, with your current grades, you're a shoe in for any university you want."

Chen Zihao didn't expect he would be comforted by his rival. After calming down and thinking about it, he thought himself mad to suddenly break his defenses and came looking for Jiang Xing. That their school's great heartthrob was willing to let him go was already generous enough; unexpectedly, he was even willing to talk to him about this.

Handsome, smart, polite, not at all aloof despite being liked by so many people and never one to show off — no one could ever hate such a boy.

Chen Zihao took a deep breath and apologized to Jiang Xing. "I'm sorry, this is my problem."

Jiang Xing watched as Chen Zihao returned to his seat and continued to bury his head in the sea of exercise sheets. He felt an invisible pressure. It's true that

Heaven rewards the diligent. Chen Zihao worked harder than he did. It was only a matter of time before he surpasses him.

Though tired of studying, he also hated the feeling of losing. He had no intention of giving up first place.

Jiang Xing sighed and reluctantly started to work on his exercise sheets. Lin Qingyu had a very good grasp of time and would only chat with Jiang Xing during break time anyway.

On Friday afternoon, Jiang Xing took half a day off and took Lin Qingyu to get his ID card settled. According to their actual ages, the two should have already passed the legal age of marriage a long time ago. But on Jiang Xing's ID card, he was still 17 years old and Jiang Xing insisted that Lin Qingyu was only a year older than him. And thus, Lin Qingyu became a boy who had barely just turned eighteen. He had very suddenly become several years younger, turning from a great beauty to a little beauty.

But a genuine Beauty was extremely malleable. Lin Qingyu's modern sense of fashion was influenced by Jiang Xing. He often wore T-shirts, jeans and sneakers. And with his hair cut short, he appeared very much like a high school or college student. But where is his precipitation of age? With a shirt and suit on, the aura of an adult beauty simply couldn't be suppressed. When he had his ID picture taken, he simply posed bare-faced, hair pushed back and a stoic expression on his face. The picture came out perfect, without any need for any

sort of retouching. He could send it directly to any entertainment agency and make his debut on the spot.

Jiang Xing was envious. “Qingyu, you’re already eighteen. You’re free, unfettered. You’re no longer subjected to the anti-addiction measures when playing games.”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “That’s true. I can even take the driver’s license test.” It wasn’t that he didn’t like riding the scooter but the days were getting colder and soon, it would really be too cold to ride the scooter.

“That’s wonderful! You can drive me to school in the future.” Jiang Xing joked, “Come the holidays, we can go for a drive down by the beach. You drive for three or four hours and I sleep on the co-pilot seat and play with my phone.”

Lin Qingyu was in a delicate mood. “Before, I had to see you off to morning court, now, I have to send you off to school?”

Jiang Xing gave a teasing smile. “There has been no news from the Dayu for a long time and we don’t know if we can ever go back. Qingyu, do you want to

go to high school with me and then take the college entrance exams? Aren't you interested in joining the country best medical school?"

Lin Qingyu was taken aback: "…Attend high school?"

"That's right. With your photographic memory, if you transfer to our school, you'll definitely take away my number one spot."

Lin Qingyu sneered slightly. "That's to be expected."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Baobei, you have absolutely no sense of humility."

Lin Qingyu thought of something and asked worriedly, "If we become classmates, can I still be your Baobei?"

"Of course. Why ever not?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Who knows? You have so many rules here. You can't approach things here with the Dayu way of thinking. For example, in the Dayu, cousins can get married, but not here."

Unlike Jiang Xing who was weary of studying, Lin Qingyu has always been interested in learning, more so if it was about medicine and poison. Because of Jiang Xing's hometown's laws, he wasn't allowed to study poison but he could

still study medicine. The medicines here were very different from the Dayu's. If he could learn a thing or two, it would truly be a blessing.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "I want to go have a look around your school."

Although they lived in a community near the school, Lin Qingyu hadn't been to Jiang Xing's school yet. The balcony of their apartment faced the school's sports grounds and Lin Qingyu would often see the students doing morning exercises for PE classes.

Whether it was in morning exercises with hundreds of thousands of people, or joint PE classes with several classes' worth of students, he could always easily spot Jiang Xing. It wasn't that he had good eyesight. Jiang Xing was so much taller than the others, that it was hard not to see him.

"Okay." Jiang Xing agreed, "And while we're at it, I'll show you another side to this city."

The high school that Jiang Xing attended has a long history. It is located in the center of the old city. Within ten minutes' walk is an urban village. An urban villages, as the name suggests, refers to villages within cities. The houses here are all old, most of them don't have elevators but there are quite a few residents.

Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing walked down a dark and narrow path lined with bustling shops. "Don't underestimate the people who live in urban villages."

Jiang Xing said, “All of them are rich people in the making.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Why do you say that?”

Jiang Xing then educated him on the concept of modern demolition. At five or six o’clock in the evening, students begun to get off school. Corporate drones were also let off work. The urban village gradually became livelier. All sorts of roadside stalls began to be set up.

Lin Qingyu was immediately attracted by various roadside stalls. It has been a while since he arrived to modern times. Jiang Xing has taken him to eat hot pot, dimsum, western food and even instant noodles. He has never taken him eat from the absolutely clean and hygienic roadside stalls.

Passing by a dorayaki shop, Lin Qingyu said, “I want to try that.”

Jiang Xing was very much aware of his role. “I’ll buy it for Baobei.”

Jiang Xing bought two, one for Lin Qingyu and one for him. After Lin Qingyu took two bites, he found the stuffing inside too sweet so he pushed the rest to

Jiang Xing. He pointed to a long skewer of something and asked, “What is that?”

“Sausage. Do you want it?”

Lin Qingyu nodded. “Yes.”

The grilled sausage was too greasy. Lin Qingyu ate a third of it and gave the rest to Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing has always believed in never wasting food and after eating one and a half dorayaki and two thirds of a sausage, he noticed a pattern and only bought one portion when Lin Qingyu proposed trying a

pudding cake. Lin Qingyu took one bite, decided that it was not to his liking and handed it over to Jiang Xing. “This does not taste good. Here.”

Jiang Xing, who had lost part of his memory and was in a relationship for the first time, was stunned. “You’re giving me even the things that taste bad? Do you really like me?”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t help laughing. “Maybe you’ll find it tasty.”

The two of them devoured nearly every kind of snack sold down the street. A subway was being built at the intersection and two excavators were hard at work. The makeshift fence did little to hide their majestic figures.

Lin Qingyu stopped and asked, “What is that?”

“They’re excavators.”

Lin Qingyu stared at it for a good long time and couldn’t help sighing, “If the Dayu had this, it wouldn’t take decades to build a palace.”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Then, would the Lord Prime Minister like invite the driver of the excavator back to the Dayu to work in the Ministry of Industry?”

Lin Qingyu glanced at Jiang Xing and knew that this person was making fun of him again. Going along with Jiang Xing’s act, he said, “In your opinion,

which of these two excavator drivers would be better?"

Jiang Xing, tone and movements exaggerated, made an assessment, "In my opinion, the master driver on the left one is more skilled in his operation. With a glance, you can tell he's from Shandong."

Lin Qingyu wondered, "How do you know?"

Jiang Xing smiled dishonestly. "I'm just guessing. You shouldn't believe me."

No man can refuse the allure of an excavator and Lin Qingyu was no exception. He stood there enthralled, reluctant to leave. Jiang Xing asked him, "Aren't you thirsty? Would you like some milk tea?"

Before Lin Qingyu could answer, he saw a girl wearing the same school uniform as Jiang Xing walking towards them. "Senior Jiang Xing——"

Jiang Xing turned around and saw a girl who looked a little familiar. She must be a freshman or sophomore in their school. "Hello?"

The girl stood still in front of Jiang Xing and when she saw Lin Qingyu, a trace of surprise flashed in her eyes. She pulled off her mask, revealing a rosy face and shyly said, "Senior, this is for you."

Before Jiang Xing could react, a cup of milk tea was forcibly stuffed into his hand. It was the first time for Lin Qingyu to see pink milk tea. It even had a

cute pattern on the cup, full of girlish charm.

The girl, seemingly afraid that Jiang Xing would refuse, turned around and ran away after delivering the milk tea.

“Senior?” Lin Qingyu said with great interest, “Is that like a ‘shixiong’?”

Jiang Xing said stiffly, “…En.” He looked like he was holding a hot potato. He wanted to throw it away but felt that it would be too rude. “Qingyu, you wait for me here.”

Jiang Xing chased after her. He returned the milk tea to the junior and politely declined her request to add him on WeChat.

After returning, Lin Qingyu looked at him, smiled lightly and said, “Why didn’t Senior accept the milk tea?”

“I don’t know her.” Jiang Xing quickly changed the subject, “Qingyu, would you like to watch a movie tonight?”

Lin Qingyu said, “But I want to play a game with Senior.”

“Then shall we go home now?”

Lin Qingyu said again, “Alright, Senior must be getting tired of lugging around

his schoolbag."

"…I was wrong," Jiang Xing put on a pained look, "Qingyu, I was wrong."

"What did you do wrong?" Lin Qingyu said calmly, "You can't control the kind words of others, and you can't control the hands of those who give gifts. You're not at all at fault."

Hope ignited in Jiang Xing's eyes. "Then you're not angry anymore?"

"Of course I wouldn't be angry with Senior."

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu saw Jiang Xing's 'nothing left to live for' expression and couldn't help smiling, "I'm really not angry. You're the one I like. If I'm the only one in the world who likes you, then my vision must be terrible. You're excellent and deserve to be liked by many people. It's a pity…" Lin Qingyu said almost pityingly, "It's a pity that as long as I'm here, you will never take a second look at them."

Is this the confidence and pride of a great beauty? Jiang Xing was relieved but not completely relieved. He felt like other people's milk tea have now created an indelible shadow over him. When he went to sleep that night, when he

lifted up the quilt, he found it filled with cups of the milk tea that almost caused his death.

Jiang Xing went to buy two cups of milk tea that were just his and Lin Qingyu's. "Qingyu, should we have a toast?"

Lin Qingyu cooperatively touched his cup against Jiang Xing's. Jiang Xing took a picture of the scene with his mobile phone and posted the picture of their two hands and two cups of milk tea on his Moments.

Soon, his phone started vibrating like crazy. Jiang Xing took a casual glance, picked out his cousin's message and replied.

Pei Zhiqi: [What does that post on your Moments mean??]

Jiang Xing: [Take a guess.]

Pei Zhiqi: [Are you seeing someone?]

Jiang Xing: [Yes.]

To be exact, he not only was seeing him but he had also married him and

married him many times over.

Pei Zhiqi: [! ! !]

Pei Zhiqi: [Who's your girlfriend? Is it one of your classmates?!]

Jiang Xing didn't feel like talking much with others, so he automatically ignored a lot of the messages. Until Pei Zhiqi sent this message: [Wait, did you remember to block teachers and our older relatives from your Moments?]

Jiang Xing: [.]

Pei Zhiqi: [Hoo boy]

Jiang Xing: [Don't get excited! It's not a big problem.]

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Extra Story 15

Throughout the weekend, Jiang Xing's cell phone and WeChat never stopped ringing. After seeing him go to the balcony to answer the phone again and again, Lin Qingyu asked him what had happened.

Jiang Xing said, "Have you seen the photo I posted on Moments?"

"I saw it." Lin Qingyu said, "Ke Tang also posts similar photos. Is there any deep meaning behind it?"

Jiang Xing said with a smile, "It's normal for her to post this kind of photo. But for me, I can sometimes go an entire year without posting anything. That's why everyone's making a big deal over nothing."

Lin Qingyu thought for a while, and guessed, "You think that milk tea is

delicious and you want to recommend it to your friends?"

"That's exactly it." Jiang Xing said casually, "Good things should be shared together, right? Let's not talk about this. How about we duo queue?"

Jiang Xing set his phone to do-not-disturb mode. — Although running away was shameful, it was just so much easier.

Lin Qingyu was doubtful. If it were over something so simple, Jiang Xing's phone wouldn't keep on vibrating. But high schoolers who study tirelessly five days a week, shouldn't be forced to talk about matters they didn't want to talk about during their hard-earned rest days.

Lin Qingyu logged into the game, opened the room and waited for Jiang Xing to go online. After waiting for a couple of minutes, Jiang Xing still hadn't

logged on. He looked up and saw Jiang Xing, holding his phone, his face looking as though it were about to crack.

“This is not good.” Jiang Xing smiled wryly, “She really made good on her word.”

“She?”

“My aunt. She used to dote on me the most. It’s her ID card I used to play games. Just now, she actually untied her ID card from my account — so cruel.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Why’d she do that?”

Jiang Xing looked at the game’s login interface and sighed. “She probably wants me to concentrate on my studies.”

Elders wouldn’t want their children dating so they usually block off their bank cards and unbind their ID cards. This must be Pei Zhiqi’s bright idea.

“She’s right, you should concentrate on your studies.” Lin Qingyu smiled lightly, his eyes like limpid waters. But Jiang Xing thought he could detect a

tinge of schadenfreude in them. “It can’t be helped. I’ll just solo queue and you can do your homework.”

It felt like a fishbone was stuck in Jiang Xing’s throat. “Why does that sound terrible for me?”

“Then, grow up quickly.” Lin Qingyu took the phone away from Jiang Xing’s hand and downloaded “Five-Year College Entrance Examination, Three-Year Simulation” to it. “When you grow up, you can do many things.”

Jiang Xing raised his eyebrows. “For example?”

Lin Qingyu knew what Jiang Xing wanted him to say. He raised the corners of his lips, “For example, I can help you pop…” Lin Qingyu suddenly broke off in the middle of speaking, “Forget it, pretend I didn’t say anything.”

He got up and made to leave, wanting to leave Jiang Xing alone to study at ease. But unexpectedly, the other party grabbed his wrist. Before he had time to react, he was already sat on Jiang Xing’s lap.

“Pop what, Baobei ? —is it pop my cherry?” Jiang Xing embraced him and smiled, “Where did you learn such inappropriate words?”

Lin Qingyu calmly said, “Then what should I have said – deflower you?”

Jiang Xing was silent for a couple of seconds and then said worriedly, “I think, rather than not letting me play games, it should be you who has his time online

controlled. What have you been learning from the Internet, Lord Prime Minister?"

"How can you and I be compared? Lin Qingyu said lightly, "So long as adults don't break the law, they're allowed to learn anything."

There are still many things a male high schooler barred from playing games could do. He could catch up on new episodes, watch movies, browse forums and if nothing seemed good enough, there's always napping. While Lin Qingyu was playing solo, Jiang Xing came over to watch him play. He even said he would play the erhu for him.

All in all, as long as it wasn't studying, Jiang Xing found anything interesting.

Lin Qingyu has long been accustomed to this. How Jiang Xing looked not wanting to study was very similar to how he looked when he didn't want to read reports in the Dayu. But Lin Qingyu wasn't worried at all. Whether it was doing homework or reading reports, if it was something Jiang Xing needed to do, no matter how reluctant he was, Jiang Xing would do it well and do it before the deadline.

Lin Qingyu originally thought that Jiang Xing wouldn't start doing his homework until Sunday night. Unexpectedly, he found him conscientiously studying after lunch. Lin Qingyu was very surprised and asked him why.

Jiang Xing clicked on Chen Zihao's post and showed it Lin Qingyu: [Today I broke my record. I only took 35 minutes on my math exercise. Unfortunately I

missed a multiple-choice question…]

It turned out that it was the male high schooler's competitive nature at work. Lin Qingyu couldn't help but smile. "Do you best, Classmate Jiang."

Jiang Xing twirled his pen, "Classmate Jiang needs to be accompanied by his boyfriend to do his best."

"Alright, I'll go grab another chair."

"No need. Let's get in bed and I'll just study there."

Lin Qingyu was thus kidnapped by Jiang Xing to lie in bed while it was still light out. The high school student lay on his beautiful wife's lap memorizing words. When he reached "vacant, vague", he suddenly got stuck.

Lin Qingyu said, "The next one should be 'vat'."

Jiang Xing looked up at him, "How do you know?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "I just heard you when you were reciting it last week."

Jiang Xing: "…Oh."

By the end of the month, the wind had turned cool. The air conditioner that had been working for half a year was finally able to take a break. Jiang Xing changed into his autumn and winter long-sleeved school uniform. Auntie has

had a lot of experience making soup and the daily soups she cooked for the two of them weren't heavy. The taste was comparable to the ones made by the Shangshi Bureau in the palace.

It was a pity that not all students enjoyed such privileges as Jiang Xing. Many of the students made do by buying dinner from the roadside stalls outside the school. In order to prevent the students from eating so much unhealthy food and to also to encourage them to eat at the canteen and thus save more time for studying, the school issued a new regulation prohibiting day students from leaving school during dinner time.

The taste of the dishes in the canteen could be said to be quite interesting; there really were too many things about it to complain about that they didn't know where to even start. The students didn't want to eat in the cafeteria and so parents were left with no choice but to work harder, preparing dinner and sending it to school every day. Jiang Xing didn't hate eating in the cafeteria, but the housekeeper worried that he wouldn't be able to get the right nutrition and so, insisted on bringing him meals every day.

After a few days, Jiang Xing faintly felt something was wrong. He asked Lin Qingyu to feel his abdominal muscles. "Do you think it's become less distinct?"

Lin Qingyu touched it several times and told him, "I don't think it feels any different from before. Why are you worried about them disappearing?"

Jiang Xing said, "Auntie sends me twice as much food as I eat by myself every day. I ate it while reading and before I know it, I've eaten it all. And after I eat, I

just sit in class. There's a big risk of getting fat."

When students reached the third year of high school, some became "fat from overwork". The boy at the desk in front of him had already gained ten pounds in just one month.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and asked, "Do you still not remember what happened in Gu Fuzhou's life?"

"Not yet." Jiang Xing's heart skipped a beat, "Could it be that I was also troubled about putting on weight in that life?"

"During that life, your biggest problem wasn't gaining weight."

"Then what was it?"

"Hair loss, going bald"

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu suppressed a smile and took the opportunity to persuade the high schooler to exercise more. "The body is the capital of the revolution. During breaks, go out and move around. And stop sending me messages during PE

classes and do actual exercise instead. If you really lose your abs, I'll despise you."

Although he knew that what Lin Qingyu said was a lie, in order to protect Lin Qingyu's beloved abs, Jiang Xing was forced to change. From then on, whenever his PE classmates invited him to play, he wouldn't refuse.

It was just that playing basketball was really tiring.

Today, while auntie was making soup, she received a WeChat message from Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing had forgotten an important form at home and he had to hand it over to the teacher before class ended that afternoon. And so, he had to ask the housekeeper to bring it to him at school.

Auntie found the form and was about to go out when she received a call from home. Auntie's father had slipped at home and was sent to the hospital. Lin Qingyu told the housekeeper to go and attend to that matter. He could take care of delivering Jiang Xing's form and dinner.

Lin Qingyu went out with the lunch box and the form. During the walk there, which usually didn't take more than five minutes, a little incident occurred. There was a bug in the traffic lights at an intersection. The time for the

pedestrians to cross was changed from 60 seconds to 5 seconds. If you wanted to cross the road, you had to run.

Lin Qingyu watched as the other pedestrians ran wildly across the road one by one, with unsightly panting faces.

This traffic light was simply unreasonable. Was no one going to handle this? Running across the street like that was simply undignified, especially with a lunch box in your arms.

But the soup Auntie made was best eaten while hot.

Lin Qingyu closed his eyes, unhappily put up the hood of the sweater and hugged Jiang Xing's lunch box against his chest. Run? I'll run! Let's run! In any case, no one can accuse him of not running for Jiang Xing.

When they arrived at school, the students still hadn't finished class yet. Lin Qingyu explained why he was there to the security guard and after registering, he was let in. This was his first time at Jiang Xing's school. The building was

quite old and it felt quite settled. The teaching buildings were connected together and from a distance, one can see black heads inside the classroom.

Lin Qingyu did not go to the teaching area but walked towards the sports ground. Jiang Xing's weekly PE class was at this time. Jiang Xing had also messaged him before his PE class.

There weren't many classes having PE at this hour so Lin Qingyu spotted Jiang Xing's field relatively easily.

It wasn't long after class started, the PE representative was leading everyone to warm up. The PE teacher was quite considerate, knowing how much stress

they were under, he simply made the students run a couple of symbolic laps and then let them play as they wished.

After the two laps, Jiang Xing's body was already feeling hot. The PE rep came to him, a basketball in his hands. "Jiang Xing, are you playing?"

Jiang Xing said reluctantly, "I'll play. You guys go on ahead. I just need to send a message first."

"Who are you sending the message to?" The PE rep said with a smile, "Your milk tea date?"

Jiang Xing bowed his head and typed. He absent-mindedly said, "Who else?"

Jiang Xing: [Qingyu, I'm off to preserve my abs. I won't have my phone with me so I might not be able to reply to your message right away.]

Lin Qingyu: [No need to reply, just turn around.]

Jiang Xing was momentarily stunned. He then raised his head and turned around. His heart skipped a beat.

Lin Qingyu was standing by the sports ground, wearing the black hoodie he'd bought for him not long ago and a mask, looking straight at him.

Why'd he even have to warm up? He spent so long warning up when all he

needed to do was lock eyes with Qingyu?

Lin Qingyu watched Jiang Xing running towards him. The corner of the boy's mouth curled up. His hair was a little messed up by the wind and the rays of the setting sun danced nimbly on him.

Lin Qingyu couldn't help his face from breaking into a smile, waiting for the boy to come to him.

Jiang Xing ran faster than even when Lin Qingyu tried to beat the traffic light.

"Qingyu, why are you here?" When Jiang Xing smiled, the corners of his brows and eyes twinkled, "Why didn't you tell me first?"

"Whenever you give me little surprises, you don't notify me in advance." Lin Qingyu gestured to him with the things in his hand, "Your form and your dinner. Something came up at Auntie's home so she left first. I didn't want to make two trips so I just brought both."

Jiang Xing took the lunch box and said, "It's so heavy. Auntie must have packed it for two."

As the two were talking, many students cast curious glances at Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu said, "Then I'll go back first."

Jiang Xing didn't want to accept this kind of inhumane scenario. "I only have half an hour until class finishes. Why don't you wait for me and we'll have

dinner at school together?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while, then nodded and agreed, "Alright. Anyway, I have nothing else to do at home."

The PE rep shouted, urging Jiang Xing, "Jiang Xing, you coming or not? You're the only one missing."

"Go," Lin Qingyu said, "I'll watch you from the sidelines."

Jiang Xing suddenly became nervous. He gulped and said, "Sigh, do you want to watch me play basketball…"

Lin Qingyu asked, "I can't?"

Jiang Xing laughed: "You can, you can. But having you watch me, makes me nervous. If I fail to appear forceful and get abused, what will I do in the future?"

Lin Qingyu turned expressionless. "Then should I go?"

"Don't, Baobei. I'm just joking with you." Jiang Xing pulled on Lin Qingyu's hoodie cap, not letting him go. "I will try my best not to be abused and to not embarrass you." Saying so, Jiang Xing took off his school uniform jacket, handed it to Lin Qingyu along with his mobile phone, turned around and ran towards the court.

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Extra Story 16

After Jiang Xing entered the court, his phone vibrated several times. Lin Qingyu unlocked it and took a look. They were messages from his class' group chat.

[@Jiang Xing, from which class is that guy you were talking to just now? He has a good temperament and good eyes. Can you ask him to take off his mask? I want to use a magnifying glass to see.]

[I don't think he's from our school. He wouldn't have been able to escape my eyes. These peepers zero in on beauty.]

[I'm guessing he's Jiang Xing's brother? I saw him deliver food to Jiang Xing.]

[That makes sense. I can see the shared male god genes.]

[I thought you were all guys. Why are you all getting so excited? With all this

fuss, I thought it was Jiang Xing's milk tea girlfriend who came.]

…

Lin Qingyu held Jiang Xing's phone and jacket in his arms. He looked towards the court. All he knew about basketball was that you had to throw the ball into the opposite basket. Ten boys attacked and defended back and forth on the court, colliding with each other, sweating profusely, full of passion.

Their blood was running hot. They were in the prime of their youth, brimming with vitality and zest for life. This was how seventeen/eighteen-year-olds should be. No matter how much of a salted fish Jiang Xing may be, his strong nature rooted deep his bones would always show itself at times like this.

Jiang Xing was one of the tallest among the boys. In their class, only the PE rep was as tall as he was. The PE rep had specially been admitted for his athletic abilities. He trained religiously every day and has developed a body rippling with muscles. Lin Qingyu watched the two confront each other and couldn't help noticing how much leaner Jiang Xing was compared to his opponent.

Jiang Xing's body did not follow the usual route of a tall man. He was slender, his muscles weren't deliberately exaggerated. His body's contours appeared

more natural. His overall appearance was much closer to that of a beautiful youth.

When Jiang Xing had been Lu Wancheng, he was too weak and Lin Qingyu felt distressed for him. When Jiang Xing had been Gu Fuzhou, whenever he pressed him down, Lin Qingyu found him rather heavy; any heavier and he wouldn't have been able to bear it. In Lin Qingyu's opinion, Jiang Xing's current figure was just right.

On the court, the PE rep could be considered a full hexagonal warrior. Save for Jiang Xing, all the others were simply no match for him. The heavy responsibility of guarding him naturally fell on Jiang Xing's shoulders. Jiang Xing's stamina and physical strength weren't as good as the PR rep's but his reflexes were quick. He heard someone yell the name of the PE rep. Jiang Xing closed in on the PE rep from an unexpected direction and intercepted the ball a second before the PE rep reached out to catch it. He quickly counter-

attacked. Jiang Xing stood outside the three-point line and held the ball firmly. He then sent it straight into the basket.

The moment he scored the point, Jiang Xing turned his head and instinctively turned to look at Lin Qingyu.

The PE rep let out a curse. “Jiang Xing, what’s gotten into you today? You’re really giving it your all.”

Jiang Xing smiled without saying a word. How can he not give it his all? His wife was watching.

Lin Qingyu was indeed watching. Jiang Xing dripping with sweat has always been one of his most favorite sights. He wasn’t the only one watching. There were many girls watching the boys play on the sidelines of the court. Two girls

were standing next to Lin Qingyu and from time to time, their conversation drifted into Lin Qingyu's ears.

A girl with short hair said, "Is the boy who came to deliver Jiang Xing's dinner today really his brother?"

The long-haired girl said, "Can't be. I heard from Pei Zhiqi that Jiang Xing's an only child."

"Oh, I see. Was the one who brought him his dinner before his mother? I don't think she looks like Jiang Xing at all."

"That's his housekeeper. It seems Jiang Xing's mother passed away when he was in junior high."

"Ah," the short-haired girl exclaimed, "How could this be…"

Lin Qingyu remembered the form that Jiang Xing had to hand in. In the column for mother, there was only a single slash.

When they were in the Dayu, Jiang Xing occasionally mentioned his parents. Lin Qingyu knew that Jiang Xing's mother had passed away, but the details were unclear. When Jiang Xing talked about his mother, he always had a nostalgic look, saying that she was strict with him and that she insisted he take

the first place in everything. Even though he complained, he never said anything bad about his mother.

“I heard it was cancer and that she’d had surgery. You know, when fighting cancer, the patient’s mood is very important. Jiang Xing had done everything to make his mom happy. I heard from Pei Zhiqi that when his mom celebrated her birthday, Jiang Xing copied down [Don’t Get Angry] and gave it to her. Unfortunately, after fighting cancer for seven years, she finally passed away. Later, Jiang Xing’s dad started another family and settled abroad, so Jiang Xing returned to Guangzhou to attend high school.”

“Damn it, Jiang Xing’s father is such a scumbag.”

“You can’t say that. His father is still being responsible. At least Jiang Xing’s monthly pocket money of more than 200,000 yuan is being provided by his father.”

The short-haired girl was shocked. “I really didn’t expect that.”

“Otherwise, where do you think Jiang Xing’s good temper came from? We’ve been classmates with Jiang Xing for so long but have you ever seen him lose control of his emotions?”

The short-haired girl shook her head.

Jiang Xing’s classmates had never seen him lose control of his emotions, but Lin Qingyu had. He had seen Jiang Xing with the taste of blood in his mouth,

saying he wanted to take someone's life; he had also seen Jiang Xing in his arms, crying and saying sorry.

Jiang Xing has obviously developed an open-minded and free-spirited character only because he was exceptional.

The short-haired girl looked at the male god running on the court and was filled with emotion. "Jiang Xing has such a good personality, I thought he must have a very happy family life."

The long-haired girl said, "Except for his parents, he should still be very happy. Although his mom is gone, the other elders in his family love him very much. Pei Zhiqi's mom even just wants to adopt him outright and take him to live with her. But, Jiang Xing felt that living with the elders would curtail his freedom so he insisted on living alone. Pei Zhiqi's mom hired a housekeeper to cook him delicious meals and take care of him…"

A burst of cheers pulled Lin Qingyu back from his thoughts. It was Jiang Xing; he'd broke through the defenses of three opposing players and made a riveting slam dunk. As soon as his feet landed on the ground, he turned around and locked eyes with Lin Qingyu.

Lin Qingyu, who was completely ignorant of the significance of basketball to modern boys: …Huh?

This basketball game went back and forth. The team led by the PE rep had a very strong offensive but Jiang Xing's side wasn't letting them gain too much

ground. They were simply playing for fun and no one kept track of the points. As soon as the class bell rang, the thoughts of every student turned towards food. The PR rep threw the basketball to Jiang Xing, “I’m gonna take a quick shower! Xiongdi, do me a favor and bring the basketball back to the equipment room.” After saying so, he ran off like was doing a hundred meter sprint.

Jiang Xing walked towards Lin Qingyu, the basketball in his arms. He lifted the hem of his shirt and wiped off his sweat. “Qingyu, what’d you think of my playing? Was I cool or not?”

“Not bad.” Lin Qingyu returned his phone and jacket to him, “Do you have something to tell me?”

Jiang Xing thought for a while. “I don’t think so.”

“Then why did you look back at me every time you scored a point? I don’t understand.”

Jiang Xing choked and asked, “Did I really do that?”

“En.”

Jiang Xing said slowly, “That’s probably because I’m still too naive. It’s my first

time being in a relationship so I ask for your understanding."

"Alright." Lin Qingyu said, "Where do you want to eat?"

The cafeteria was overcrowded and taking Lin Qingyu to his classroom would be inconvenient. Jiang Xing took the lunch box from Lin Qingyu and said, "Let's go to the football field? We'll make a picnic out of it."

The football field was covered with artificial grass. Sitting and having a meal there had its own kind of elegance. Lin Qingyu nodded. "Okay."

Since it was dinner time, there was almost no one on the field. The two sat beside the wire fence, with Jiang Xing's school jacket serving as their cushion. Jiang Xing opened the lunch box. On the top layer were fried beef with scallions and sweet and sour pork tenderloin. There was a partition between the two dishes to prevent the tastes from mixing. The second layer held two vegetable dishes, stir-fried okra and cucumber salad. In the flask was well-

stewed tree mushroom and fig duck soup. Auntie also prepared a box of sliced cantaloupes.

Lin Qingyu reminded him, “It is not advisable to eat immediately after strenuous exercise. You can eat some fruit first.”

Jiang Xing speared a piece of cantaloupe with a toothpick and moved it to Lin Qingyu’s mouth, “Open wide.”

The cantaloupe was sweet and juicy, its flesh fine and tender. It could be consider a simple natural delicacy. As Lin Qingyu chewed and swallowed slowly, he heard Jiang Xing say, “Auntie’s plate-setting skills seem off today. This doesn’t look as good as the ones she made before.”

Lin Qingyu immediately swallowed the cantaloupe in his mouth and complained to Jiang Xing, “It has nothing to do with Auntie. It’s that traffic light’s fault.”

Jiang Xing didn’t understand. “Huh?”

“The traffic light at that intersection near your place. The green light only lasts five seconds. In order to get the food to you, I had to run across with the lunch box in my arms. The lunch box was jolted around so of course, the dishes inside would be messed up.” Lin Qingyu said coldly, “Is that traffic light defective? I really hate it. Is there any way to get rid of it? I don’t want to have

to run like that every time I go out. If that thing was in the Dayu, I would definitely have it uprooted."

Lin Qingyu looked so stern but Jiang Xing couldn't help laughing out loud; a hearty, unrestrained and boisterous laugh.

Lin Qingyu frowned. "You think this is a laughing matter?"

Not only was Jiang Xing laughing, he was laughing so much that he couldn't stand upright. His elbow knocked into the basketball that had been placed to one side causing it to roll.

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"The great Lord Prime Minister's first enemy after coming to the modern age is unexpectedly…!" Jiang Xing pointed to the top of his head and said with a smile, "You're going to empty my health bar from cuteness, Qingyu, Baobei ."

Lin Qingyu frowned. "I don't understand." He had only seen heath bars in games. Where did Jiang Xing get a health bar?

Jiang Xing laughed so hard that he couldn't speak. A big smile on his face, he took out his mobile phone to search which to department he should report

traffic lights problems.

Lin Qingyu was simply baffled. “What’s so funny?”

Jiang Xing didn’t know how to explain his feelings to Lin Qingyu. He just wanted to laugh and his lips just can’t help ticking up when he sees Lin Qingyu, especially when he says such cute things.

Lin Qingyu, who still couldn’t get an explanation, grew quite impatient. “Jiang Xing!”

The last few students had also left, leaving only him and Jiang Xing on the football field. Jiang Xing finally had enough of laughing and said, “You ask me why I’m laughing but I don’t know…”

As he said that, Jiang Xing lowered his head and kissed his lips as if he couldn’t hold it anymore.

The dusk cast an amber light as the evening breeze blew lazily. The basketball rolled and rolled, finally stopping in the football net. Even time seemed to stand still at this moment.

He and Jiang Xing sat on the campus green, kissing quietly.

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Extra Story 17

The elder in the housekeeper auntie's family had suffered a fall and needed to be hospitalized. The housekeeper asked for a week off to look after her family. Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing had to resolve the matter of their meals by themselves. Jiang Xing could eat in the school cafeteria; he was actually more worried about Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu said, "Don't worry, I won't treat myself badly."

Having been living in modern times for some time, Lin Qingyu now has a clear understanding of Jiang Xing's family background. Jiang Xing wasn't a boyfriend who needed him to save money. Since they might return to the Dayu, what Jiang Xing needed was a boyfriend who would help him spend money. So, every day while Jiang Xing was queuing up in the school cafeteria, he would receive photos from Lin Qingyu.

In the morning, Lin Qingyu went to a time-honored Cantonese-style breakfast restaurant. A pot of Pu-erh tea, which the merchant claimed was good but was

only mediocre for the Dayu empress, was served with satay steamed tripe, golden shrimp dumpling, and congee with six different types of fixings. In the afternoon, Lin Qingyu went to the top floor of a five-star hotel for afternoon tea, sitting by the window overlooking the entire central business district. In the evening, he tried a highly-recommended hot pot restaurant near their home. In the short video he took for Jiang Xing, the red oil hot pot was bubbling, a piece of fresh wagyu beef was blanched for eight seconds and then dipped in the Jiang Family's secret dipping sauce.

The chicken drumstick rice in front of Jiang Xing was suddenly not quite as delicious. He too took a photo of his dinner and sent it to Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu replied to him with the words "how miserable".

Jiang Xing: [I also want to eat hot pot.]

Lin Qingyu: [I can pack it up for you and take it home.]

Jiang Xing: [How do you take home hot pot?]

Lin Qingyu: [I'll go and buy a pot.]

For a moment, Jiang Xing couldn't tell whether Lin Qingyu was joking or not. He imagined the scene of the big beauty carrying the red oil hot pot in a basin and couldn't help laughing out loud.

Automatically, the other boys who were seated with him turned to look

towards him, showing knowing looks.

“Falling in love’s so scary,” one of the boys said. “It’s turned our school’s male god into a handsome himbo who laughs at his phone.”

“Don’t, you’re gonna kill me from laughter. He and you took the same test. What did you score and what did Jiang Xing score? How do you have the face to call him a himbo?” The PE Rep stared at the chicken drumsticks on Jiang Xing’s plate. “Xing Ge, see how I protected your dignity? Don’t you think that deserves a chicken leg?”

Jiang Xing was so busy sending messages to his boyfriend that he didn’t even hear what they were saying: [Isn’t it boring eating out alone?]

Lin Qingyu: [No, eating alone is peaceful.]

Jiang Xing looked at a teddy bear on the background of the photo, pondering. His terrible friends were still trying to wrestle information about his milk tea girlfriend from out of him. Jiang Xing said, “Tell the teacher I’ll be absent the rest of the day, will you?” He put the chicken leg into the PE rep’s bowl, “Here’s your reward. No need to thank me.”

What Lin Qingyu said had been half-truth and half-lie. For Lin Qingyu, going out alone might not necessary be peaceful as he’s often stopped by passers-by asking for his WeChat. Also, since not many people eat hotpot alone, the waitresses probably felt he was lonely and so put a big teddy bear to sit opposite. They would come round from time to time to ask if he needed

anything and to constantly refill his tea and water. While Lin Qingyu simply wanted to eat his hotpot in peace.

The hot pot restaurant was full with most tables taken by small groups. With a teddy bear as a dinner partner, Lin Qingyu seemed a little out of place. Besides, delicious food like hot pot should be shared with relatives and friends.

Lin Qingyu thought of his parents and his younger brother. As for friends… the first thing he thought of was Shen Huaishi.

In the Dayu, others either respected him or feared him and many admirers simply coveted his face. It seemed that only Shen Huaishi treated him with sincerity.

He didn't know whether these people he care about in the Dayu were doing fine.

Lin Qingyu was absent-mindedly eating the hot pot when the waitress came by again and asked, "Would the pretty boy like some more water?"

Lin Qingyu was instantly going to refuse when he suddenly realized something and surprised, raised his head.

The big bear opposite had been pushed aside and a high school student in his school uniform, pulled off his schoolbag and sat down, greeting him with a

smile, “Hi.”

At this hour, Jiang Xing should still be in evening self-study. Lin Qingyu was momentarily stunned, “Are you — skipping class?”

“I don’t want to either but I’m really greedy for —,” Jiang Xing looked at him, “Hot pot.”

As soon as Jiang Xing showed up, Lin Qingyu’s little bit of homesickness disappeared. A slight smile danced at the corner of his lips but what he said made the high schooler heartbroken. “Have you finished your homework?”

Jiang Xing lowered his head and ticked a few more dishes on the order sheet. He said, “I’ll find time to finish it later.”

Lin Qingyu said casually, “Chen Zihao must have finished his homework long ago. I bet when he gets home, he does a few more sets of exercises sheets.”

Jiang Xing raised his head and raised his eyebrows. “The Lord Prime Minister’s words are simply inspiring. I propose they be included in “Encouraging Learning“. ”

Lin Qingyu knew better than anyone whether Jiang Xing’s excuse of being greedy for hotpot was real. “You promised me that puppy love wouldn’t affect your studies.”

Jiang Xing tapped twice on his phone and handed it to Lin Qingyu. “Please

take a look, Lord Prime Minister."

Lin Qingyu saw a page with a table. "This is…"

"My report card of the first mock exam. What do you say, can I eat hot pot now?"

Lin Qingyu sighed softly, impressed once again by this salted fish. "Did you secretly work hard again?"

Jiang Xing admitted with a smile, "Of course. No one succeeds without effort. Even I have to work hard to achieve results. Only that once you reach a certain level, say top five for my age group, it might be more of a matter of talent and luck. I'm very efficient at school. When I'm not thinking of you, all I think

about is studying, so I can afford a night off from self-study and have a hot pot meal with you."

Lin Qingyu picked up a piece of shrimp for Jiang Xing. "There are no absolutes. For some people, success comes more easily."

"Baobei, you really think too highly of me."

"I was talking about me."

"I see."

After eating the hot pot, Jiang Xing wanted to go to the movies. It was already late by the time the movie ended and the two of them walked home. When they passed by the school, they suddenly heard someone call Jiang Xing's name.

Lin Qingyu stopped and saw a few boys wearing the same school uniform as Jiang Xing walking towards them, their steps were quite aggressive. Lin Qingyu looked as though he wanted to stick needles into all of them. He asked Jiang Xing, "Are they your classmates?"

Jiang Xing shrugged, "I don't know."

"It's really Jiang Xing." The leading boy's eyes wandered between Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu and when he realized that he wasn't taller or more handsome

than either of them, his face became even uglier. “Is it you who rejected Fang Shiwei? You broke her heart?”

Jiang Xing asked, “Who’s Fang Shiwei?”

“And you even made her cry?”

Jiang Xing: “?”

“Heh.” The boy sneered, “You listen up. She’s my girlfriend now. Stay away from her, don’t let her see you. Laozi’s woman can only have laozi in her eyes.”

Jiang Xing silently took off his school uniform, trying to separate himself from being identified as schoolmates with these idiots.

Lin Qingyu thought for a while, then turned towards Jiang Xing’s cheek. Jiang Xing lowered his head and put his ear to Lin Qingyu’s mouth. Lin Qingyu asked, “Is this what they mean by “Chuunibyou”?”

Jiang Xing smiled, “You’re so smart.”

Lin Qingyu glanced at the boy and spit out what Jiang Xing held back. “You idiot.”

The boy was suddenly angered and he approached Lin Qingyu menacingly.

“Who the hell are you to insult me!”

A hand blocked the boy’s way. Jiang Xing exerted a little force and the boy was pushed back a couple of steps. “Buddy, you’ve said what you wanted to say,” Jiang Xing was still smiling, but his eyes weren’t as bright as usual. “Let’s end things here.”

The boy looked down at Jiang Xing’s hand and knew it was a threat. He looked down and looked up, pressed his tongue against his cheek and said with a sneer, “End it here? I’m willing to fight for my woman, are you afraid?”

Jiang Xing said “Oh”, thinking that this chuuni boy was going to make all modern high school students lose face.

“Don’t any of you move.” The boy stared at Jiang Xing, “I want to fight him one-on-one.”

As soon as the words were out of his mouth, a black figure quietly appeared behind the boy. The boy felt a chill on his neck and his collar was suddenly yanked. Before he even realized what had happened, a crashing sound filled his

ears and a burning pain burst on his back — It was him. He'd been flung and he hit the trash can on the side of the road.

The boy yelled, "You trash, launching a sneak attack! You're shameless!"

Lin Qingyu said in disgust, "Shut up. We didn't do anything." He looked at the shadow behind the boy and murmured, "…it's him."

A man came out from the shadows, wearing the uniform of a shadow guard of the Dayu, a sword strapped around his waist. He looked at Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu with surprise in his eyes.

The moment Jiang Xing saw the man, the blurry picture in Jiang Xing's mind gradually cleared. — the surrounded city in the frontier, the soldiers, the

cavalry, the flames of war and all the arrows. He couldn't help blurting out, "Huaishi?"

Lu Wancheng had never met Shen Huaishi and Jiang Xing only saw Shen Huaishi for the first time when he was Gu Fuzhou. Lin Qingyu was a little surprised, "You remember?"

When he'd recovered his memory as Lu Wancheng, Jiang Xing was still a little excited. Now he couldn't get excited, instead, he smiled sadly, "Yeah, I remembered it all."

Shen Huaishi, who came from afar, said solemnly: "Your Majesties, Emperor, Empress, you escort is late!"

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

After a weird silence, the boy lying beside the trash can broke out into a burst of earth-shattering laughter. "Pfft hahahahaha—the emperor and empress! Hahahaha——"

At this moment, Jiang Xing could feel the premature end of his high school career. He couldn't stay in this world any longer. Please take him back to the Dayu immediately.

Lin Qingyu though still remained calm, "Was it Xu Junyuan who sent you

here?"

"Yes, the National Teacher said…"

"This is not the place to talk." Lin Qingyu looked around, "Put your sword away first or you'll be arrested by the police."

The two brought Shen Huaishi home. Shen Huaishi had just arrived and without any foundational knowledge like Lin Qingyu, for him everything here absolutely amazed him. Keeping in mind the purpose of his trip, he reported to the now law-abiding empress, "The National Teacher said that he's still trying

out various method to return you both to the Dayu, please be patient and remain calm."

"Try?" Lin Qingyu said coolly, "It's already been a month, how long will he have to try? The country can't remain without an emperor. If this drags on, the civil and military officials may have to establish a new emperor."

Shen Huaishi said, "Your Majesty, please do not worry. A month in another world is only a short while in the Dayu. As soon as you left, the National Teacher sent me to pass on the message."

"The other world must be relative." Jiang Xing said, "I stayed in the Dayu for seven years and it was only as long as my nap when I come back here."

Lin Qingyu pondered, "Could it be that we have to stay here for seven years before we can go back?"

Jiang Xing said, "Seven years is a long time."

Lin Qingyu said, "Actually, it's not so bad. That'll be enough time for you to finish a combined undergraduate and master's degree."

Jiang Xing thought he must have heard wrong. "What about a combined undergraduate and master's degree? No, Qingyu, I'm so tired of studying. I

almost lost my life in my third year of high school. You want me to go to graduate school?"

Lin Qing smiled slightly, "The Dayu's ruler turned from a high school dropout to a master's degree holder. This is a good thing that will benefits the country and the people. For the sake of the common people, I ask that the Emperor be wronged for another seven years."

Jiang Xing also smiled, "These are words spoken from anger. I don't believe you."

Shen Huaishi said, "The National Teacher also said that if a person leaves this world, the time in this world will be static. In other words, when we go back, the time in the Dayu will not have changed."

Jiang Xing found a blind point, "You mean, seven years later, my body will be 24 years old and my mental age will be 31 years old. When I return to the

Dayu, according to the theory of relatively static time, I'll be returning to that body that just turned eighteen?"

Shen Huaishi was made a little dizzy by Jiang Xing's question. After sorting it out in his mind, he said solemnly. "The Emperor is wise."

Jiang Xing: "This…"

Lin Qingyu: "…Heh."

Lin Qingyu asked Shen Huaishi about the details, while Jiang Xing went to the balcony to call his grandfather's assistant. "It's me. Nothing's the matter but I have a black householder friend who needs to apply for an ID card — Yes, another one. "

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Extra Story 18

Xu Junyuan had sent Shen Huaishi basically to tell them to rest easy. In doing so, Shen Huaishi had now also become stranded in the modern world.

“It’s getting late, let’s go to bed earlier.” Lin Qingyu said calmly, “The Emperor still as to attend tomorrow.”

Hearing the word “Emperor”, Jiang Xing’s toes curled in mortification. By now, not only had he recalled the events of Gu Fuzhou’s life, but a good deal of his memories as Xiao Li had already returned. But while the word ‘Emperor’ in the Dayu evoked supreme respect, in modern times it evoked supreme cringe.

So much so that he might as well change his name to ‘chuuni‘. Chuuni Mama opened the door for Chuuni. Oh, Chuuni, you’re back!

Jiang Xing covered his face with his hands. “Qingyu, are you doing this on purpose?”

Lin Qingyu smiled and said to Shen Huaishi, “Things here aren’t like in the Dayu. From now on, here, you can just call me and Jiang Xing by our names.”

Shen Huaishi quickly said, “This subordinate dares not.”

“Well, you better start daring.” Jiang Xing complained, “Because of your ‘Emperor, Empress’, I’m already considering transferring schools.”

Shen Huaishi was about the same height as Jiang Xing. Lin Qingyu brought him a set of Jiang Xing’s clothes and taught him how to take a bath. Jiang Xing also made a bed for him. Shen Huaishi was overwhelmed by the favor, but because he was unfamiliar with the place, even though he wanted to take care of things himself, he didn’t know where to start and could only accept the care of the two.

After Shen Huaishi settled down, Jiang Xing went to take a shower first. Lin Qingyu was sitting at the table checking over Jiang Xing’s Chinese homework when he was distracted by Jiang Xing’s continuously vibrating phone.

It was Jiang Xing’s friend group. There were six boys in the group, all of whom were close friends with Jiang Xing and they were currently all making a fuss. It

started with one boy posting a short video. Lin Qingyu clicked on the video and saw himself, Jiang Xing, Shen Huaishi and the chuuni boy earlier.

This video must have been filmed by one of the members of the chuuni boy's group. The original intention had been to secure evidence that Jiang Xing had been the one to hit first. Instead, they'd managed to capture a big surprise.

"Your Majesties, Emperor, Empr-…"

Without waiting for the word "Empress" to finish, Lin Qingyu decisively turned off the video. At this hour, male high schoolers would still be awake and the five boys were all fired up because of this video:

[Hahahahahaha, I laughed so hard I was practically crowing. Children within a ten kilometer radius all thought it was dawn and picked up their schoolbags to head to school. I was almost caught by the canteen owner and made into kung pao chicken!]

[The question is, who's the empress? The milk tea girlfriend?]

[Do you see any girl in the video? That brother standing next to Jiang Xing seems to be that handsome boy who came to school to deliver his dinner last time——God, what have I done? I, a commoner, having been calling His Majesty by his name this entire time! This subject deserves death!]

[Your Majesty, are you considering taking in a concubine? I'm not gay, but with your face (and your money) I think I can do it. Name me your concubine

and I will serve the Empress during her maternal confinement.]

Lin Qingyu's eyes froze over. Somber expression on his face, he sent: [And you think you're the one who gets to make this decision?]

"I'm done with my shower. You can take yours now." Jiang Xing came out of the shower, felt the coldness radiating from Lin Qingyu's body and paused in the middle of wiping his hair, "Baobei?"

"Ridiculous." Lin Qingyu said coldly, "If this were the Dayu, I would definitely…" Lin Qingyu closed his eyes and silently muttered, "Criminal Law". "Forget it, I'm going to take a bath."

Jiang Xing watched Lin Qingyu walk into the bathroom, completely unaware of what had happened. He only realized when he picked up his phone and saw the chat history.

Jiang Xing sent three smiling expressions.

[The emperor is here! Brothers, hurry up!]

[The emperor is here – long live the emperor, long live, long live!]

Jiang Xing: [You should be thankful you live in a society ruled and protected by law. If we were in ancient times, your mouths would have already gotten you

white silk ties within a day.]

[Xing Ge, when did you ascend to the throne? Why didn't you tell us?]

Jiang Xing said nothing, sending only another smiley face.

[Based on two years of seatmate friendship with His Majesty, I insist that I be made regent!]

Jiang Xing: [Where did the video come from?]

[I saw on the school's main group chat. It's probably already been passed around a thousand times.]

Jiang Xing: […]

[Your Majesty, just what is going on?]

Jiang Xing: [A friend was playing a prank on me. If you can't even tell that, you better get your eyes checked.]

[Well, your friend deserves an Oscar. That "Emperor" was so sincere, it almost made me want to kneel down and shout 'long live the Emperor!']

[That costume's also pretty good. It looked so fucking real.]

Jiang Xing endured his friends' teasing and Lin Qingyu finished his bath.

Because he was upset, Lin Qingyu forgot to take his clothes into the bathroom with him. He came out with only a bath towel wrapped around his waist. Jiang Xing raised his head from his mobile phone, saw the drops of water on Lin Qingyu's lower back. His breath suddenly stuck in his throat.

During his time as Gu Fuzhou and Xiao Li, he'd done many things with this body in front of him.

He'd really slept with Lin Qingyu and done so many times, in all sorts of places. He remembered how it felt to be inside Lin Qingyu.

He'd been fine while he was ignorant and knew nothing. He could simply regard himself as an ordinary student. But now that he has remembered…

Lin Qingyu felt Jiang Xing's unusual gaze, turned around and asked, "What?"

Jiang Xing hesitated to speak, "Qingyu, I want…"

Lin Qingyu took his clothes and walked to the bathroom, calmly saying, "No, you don't want to."

Jiang Xing laughed. "Then why don't you sleep with me and put me to the test?"

Lin Qingyu said, "I will."

Probably because he was too tired from school, this temptation proved not

that hard to resist. He was uncomfortable and hot, but it wasn't enough to stop him from falling sleep. It just goes to prove that what those scumbags tell girls about feeling so uncomfortable and in pain, that they would die if they didn't do it, was all just a bunch of bullshit.

Jiang Xing began memorizing "Chu Shi Biao" and in the process, his lids grew heavy and he naturally fell asleep. Lin Qingyu opened his eyes, looked at the boy lying next to him and sighed silently.

Jiang Xing wasn't the only one being tested by sharing a bed. He found a comfortable position in Jiang Xing's arms and whispered, "I want to too, but I can't be caught by the police."

The next day, Lin Qingyu took Shen Huaishi to find Teacher Tony. Teacher Tony saw Shen Huaishi's temperament and knew exactly what hairstyle was suitable for him. After one session, Shen Huaishi had transformed from a

plain-looking passerby in ancient attire to a modern handsome guy with properly proportioned features.

Lin Qingyu said, “It’s just a shorter hairstyle but it created such a big change.”

Teacher Tony said with a smile, “This sort of thing is very common. A lot of those ‘ugly’ guys in period dramas actually look quite good in modern dramas, right? Only true ‘male gods’ are able to make any look work.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Huaishi, what do you think?”

Shen Huaishi touched his prickly short hair and said shyly, “I’m not used to it.”

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. “You’ll quickly get used to it.”

As Teacher Tony was sending the two of them out, he said to Lin Qingyu, “Have you given any thought to what I told you last time? Many of my

customers are people in the circle, and I can introduce you——With a face like that, not entering the entertainment industry is simply too wasteful."

Before, Lin Qingyu didn't know when they would return and so, making sure to be ready to return to the Dayu at any time, he hadn't made any plans for his modern life. Now, it seemed that he should have some long-term goals.

Lin Qingyu once again thought of this modern age's highest medical institution. He replied to Teacher Tony, "There's no need for me to consider it. I'm not interested in this matter."

With Shen Huashi's arrival, Lin Qingyu became very busy. He began teaching Shen Huaishi to recognize simplified characters, to use electrical appliances and to become familiar with modern society. What surprised Jiang Xing was that Shen Huaishi learned quite quickly. Although he wasn't as good as Lin Qingyu with his photographic memory, he could remember most things after seeing and hearing it a couple of times. He was performing much better than a lot of the native born academic slags.

Jiang Xing's surprise drew Lin Qingyu's attention. "Do you have the wrong idea about Heaven's Prison Sect? In modern times, Heaven's Prison Sect is

comparable to the CIA. Every member of Heaven's Prison Sect is a one in a million talent. Shen Huaishi, as its leader, naturally has good learning ability."

Shen Huaishi was very embarrassed. "It's thanks to the empr-… to Qingyu's great teaching."

After they secured Shen Huaishi's ID card, there was now a lot more things the two of them could do.

On Monday, Jiang Xing went to school as though serving a sentence. Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi took a cruise down the Pearl River, watching the bustling city from on board a luxury sightseeing boat.

On Tuesday, Jiang Xing was worked harder than a dog and was more tired than one. Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi hiked up Baiyun Mountain, overlooking the city and watching the sunset.

On Wednesday, Jiang Xing was barely holding on to his life. Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi ate at a century-old Cantonese restaurant. When brought back home roast goose for Jiang Xing to eat when he was tired from doing homework.

On Thursday, Jiang Xing's life was hanging by a thread. Lin Qingyu stayed at home and taught Shen Huaishi how to play games. Jiang Xing returned home

after studying late into the night to see his empress playing an assassin and his assassin playing an empress.

On Friday, Jiang Xing barely survived by relying on his obsession with the weekend. During class break, Jiang Xing was looking at the photos Lin Qingyu had sent him, when the PE Rep came to gossip with him. “Your Majesty, I have something important to report.”

Jiang Xing pressed down on the space between his brows. What’s done was done and so, he decided to simply go along with it. “What is it?”

“A new girl has been transferred to the class next door. It is said that she is a mixed-race little beauty with curly hair and big round eyes…”

Jiang Xing’s heart skipped a beat and he asked, “Does our school also accept transfer students?”

The PE Rep scratched his head. “I think you’re missing the point?”

“Zhen asked you something.”

The PE Rep was stunned by Jiang Xing. “Replying to His Majesty. Of course, the school accepts transfers. As long as you have this…” The PE Rep made the gesture to indicate money, “And pass the transfer test. Of course, if you donate

tens of millions or maybe a building to the school, you'd probably be able to get in without even taking the exam."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "So that's it."

That evening, when Jiang Xing came home from school, Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi were sitting on the sofa, looking at the tablet computer, researching who knows what.

"You're back." Lin Qingyu said, "Do you have a lot of homework this weekend?"

"A lot? Please call it what it is, which is 'endless'." Jiang Xing threw down his schoolbag dejectedly and walked to the two of them, "What are you looking at?"

Shen Huaishi said, "Qingyu is debating whether to go to Beijing or Xi'an."

"Beijing? Xi'an?"

"Huaishi got his ID card. We're planning to take the high-speed rail or plane to visit other cities." Lin Qingyu explained, "Beijing is the country's current

capital and there are countless institutions of higher learning there. Xi'an is the ancient capital of thirteen dynasties so it's worth a visit."

Jiang Xing said, "Why choose? Of course we'll go visit everywhere. But there's still two months before winter vacation. It's too early to make plans now."

Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi looked at each other and Lin Qingyu said, "Why wait for winter vacation? Huaishi and I can go anytime."

Jiang Xing had a heart attack. Pointing at himself, he asked, "You and Huaishi? What about me?"

Lin Qingyu said, matter of fact, "Don't you have to go to school?"

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu comforted him, "We'll go on Monday and return on Friday. That way, we can still be with you on the weekends."

Jiang Xing took the tablet from Lin Qingyu's hand and said, "Let's explore that later. Take a look at this first."

Jiang Xing put the two forms on the table and at the top of the forms were the words, "Transfer Application Form".

Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi both raised their heads at the same time and cast

questioning looks at Jiang Xing.

“Zhen will have you both attend school.”

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Extra Story 19

Jiang Xing's high school was one of the city's key schools. Obtaining the transfer qualifications wasn't easy. Even though he'd used his family connections to obtain those transfer qualifications, Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi still had to take the transfer exam.

Lin Qingyu had no objection to this. He had checked and found that if he wanted to enter the best medical school, he had to take the college entrance

examination and he had to get a fairly high score. Even had Jiang Xing not said anything, he still would have wanted to attend.

Shen Huaishi was a little uneasy. “Your Majesty, do I-do I have to go to school too?”

Jiang Xing raised the corners of his lips and smiled happily, “Of course, I’m not letting either of you escape.”

Shen Huaizhi said, “But I’m only here to protect the emperor and empress.”

Jiang Xing said, “If you want to protect us, you must at least be by our side. If Qingyu and I both go to school, how will you protect us?”

Shen Huaishi said without hesitation, “From the shadows.”

Lin Qingyu said, “I prefer that you protect us out in the open.”

Since the Empress had already spoken, Shen Huaishi had no choice but to agree. Jiang Xing hired retired special-grade teachers as tutors for the two of them, one for each subject. They studied nine to six on weekdays, with weekends off. After class, Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi still had to complete the homework assigned by the teachers. They had very full schedules.

Lin Qingyu learned quickly. At the beginning of the month, he had just started to learn the basics of junior high school physics and by the end of the month, he had already started to use Lenz’s law. He was a natural at languages. He had

learned Cantonese easily when he was in the Dayu and now, memorizing English words was as easy as drinking water. This photographic memory skill went against the natural order. Jiang Xing suspected that Lin Qingyu's vocabulary after two months of learning English could easily crush his.

Shen Huaishi wasn't quite as good. Although his studies also went smoothly, he was only human after all and wasn't a match for a god of learning. Lin Qingyu's speed of learning was many times faster than Shen Huaishi. In order to wait for him to catch up, Lin Qingyu also took the time to pass his driver's license test – all subjects 1 to 4 were passed with full marks in one go.

When Lin Qingyu got his driver's license, he became the student who passed the fastest since the establishment of the driving school. For this reason, the driving school made him a pennant with the words "Most Beautiful Student".

Winter vacation was fast approaching, which meant that finals were coming soon and then only half a year would be left before the college entrance examinations. All high school seniors work very hard and Jiang Xing was no exception. Even during the New Year's holidays, he studied at home. With Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi studying along with him, he finally felt that all was right with the world.

On New Year's Eve, the housekeeper Auntie got off work after preparing a sumptuous dinner. Guangzhou wasn't so cold in winter and the three of them set up a small dining table on the balcony, facing the Pearl River and Slim

Waist. Jiang Xing even opened one of the bottles of red wine that his father had kept for many years.

As a Dayu native, Lin Qingyu has no special feelings for New Year's. He preferred to celebrate Lunar New Year. But Jiang Xing was so excited that he

naturally decided to go along with him. He watched Jiang Xing take out three glasses for the red wine and asked, “Can minors drink?”

Jiang Xing immediately answered, “Yes.”

Lin Qingyu narrowed his eyes. “Let me check.”

“…Is there not even this little bit of trust between husband and wife?”

Lin Qingyu said, “Yes.” In matters like this, he had no trust in Jiang Xing at all. After all, Jiang Xing was also the one who told him that in modern times, people go into hot springs in the nude.

Lin Qingyu found the “Law on the Prevention of Juvenile Delinquency”, which stated that minors were not allowed to smoke and drink alcohol. At the same time, it prohibited businesses from selling tobacco and alcohol to minors.

“You can’t drink too much but the occasional drink at home shouldn’t hurt.” Lin Qingyu raised his chin towards the wine glass, “Pour the wine then.”

Jiang Xing feigned a burdened figure and then pretended to sigh, “I’ve finally discovered that in this family, I am but a servant.”

Hearing these words, Shen Huaishi felt as if he was suddenly faced with a formidable enemy. He quickly got up and said, “This subordinate shall serve

their Majesties."

Shen Huaishi was extremely remorseful. After living in this house for a couple of months, he had gradually gotten used treating the emperor and empress as equals; so much so that he found himself doing something so disrespectful as sitting and waiting for the emperor to pour him wine.

"Sit down." Lin Qingyu gave Jiang Xing a look of "see what you did". "Jiang Xing's just putting on an act. Don't mind him."

Jiang Xing pressed down Shen Huaishi's shoulder and pushed him back down to sit. "You call me 'Your Majesty' again while we're here and you better believe I'm gonna make you eat this wine bottle."

Shen Huaishi's eyes widened and he pursed his lips. "This subordinate… Huaishi dares not."

It was Lin Qingyu's first time to drink red wine and for the first two sips, he found that he wasn't quite used to the taste. After a few more sips, he was awakened to the beauty of red wine; it's pleasant aroma, mellow taste and long aftertaste.

Once they were done with dinner, there were still a few more hours before midnight. A lot of people had already gathered in the square near Slim Waist. Counting down the New Year in front of a city's landmark is undoubtedly one of the most traditional ways to celebrate the New Year's. No matter how lively

the square was, their residential building was still quite peaceful. Slim Waist was right before their eyes, as if they could reach out and touch.

Lin Qingyu suggested playing games to pass the rest of the time. He was still very much interested in online games. He liked playing assassin and he also enjoyed controlling the overall situation and taking the enemy's life when they're caught off guard.

Jiang Xing said, "But it's already past nine o'clock." Ever since his puppy love relationship was discovered, Jiang Xing was forced to use his own ID card to

play games. Thanks to the anti-addiction system for minors, he could only play for an hour a day even on holidays.

Lin Qingyu threw a sympathetic look towards the male high schooler. “Then you can only watch me and Huaishi play.”

Jiang Xing forced a smile on his face. “That doesn’t sound very interesting.”

“Then would a math exercise sheet be more interesting?”

Shen Huaishi was moved to pity by Jiang Xing’s expression that he cracked and he offered to accompany Jiang Xing to do his homework. “I’ve also fallen behind on my homework. So, I’ll go work on those with Jiang Xing.”

In order not to disturb the two of them, Lin Qingyu put on headphones. Jiang Xing couldn’t see the game screen or hear the sound, so he could only judge the battle situation by the expression on Lin Qingyu’s face.

At the beginning of the game, Lin Qingyu frowned unhappily. It must be because he’d been robbed of the jungler position and was forced to make do with a different role.

Lin Qingyu’s expression became colder and colder, indicating that the game was going against them.

Killing intent floated in his eyes… Was he being camped or had he been killed

in retaliation?

At the end of the game, Lin Qingyu took off his headphones and threw his cell phone. He took a deep breath, suppressed his anger and said, “Idiot.”

While Shen Huaishi was taking a shower, Jiang Xing left his half-done exercise sheet and sat down beside Lin Qingyu. “What’s wrong?”

“Some idiot robbed me of the jungler position and I was forced to play a marksman. He also had the support follow him so I often wound up fighting two to one, sometimes even three or four would gang up against me. And

despite all that I was able to kill a few. Then that idiot actually had to gall to put the blame on me, saying that my marksman isn't even fit to clean toilets."

Jiang Xing: "…" It's over. He felt a little like laughing. What should he do?

Jiang Xing tried his best to hold back his laughter. His intuition told him that if he laughs now, he'll probably lose his wife.

"That overconfident noob actually has the gall to try and teach me how to do things." Lin Qingyu became angrier and angrier as he spoke. He stretched out his arms to Jiang Xing.

Jiang Xing picked up the beauty who wanted a hug and put him on his lap. "Don't be angry, don't be angry. I'll help you report him."

"What's the use of reporting him?" Lin Qingyu rested his forehead on Jiang Xing's shoulder, "I want this person hunted all across the country and disposed of as soon as possible."

Jiang Xing deliberately went along with it, "Sure. Then, send me his in-game account page and I'll help you arrest him."

Lin Qingyu hesitated and felt that his plans might be a bit too much. "Forget it,

it's just a game."

Jiang Xing laughed. Lin Qingyu's reaction was exactly as he had imagined.

"Why am I still so angry?" Lin Qingyu closed his eyes, "I'll go answer an English exercise sheet to vent."

Once Shen Huaishi came back, they became three students sitting in a row, diligently doing their homework. After Lin Qingyu finished his English exercise sheet, Jiang Xing helped him check the answers. Seeing that all the

objective questions were correct, Jiang Xing couldn't help but ask, "Qingyu, how did you do it?"

Lin Qingyu said lightly, "What do you mean? You can do it too, can't you?"

"For sure. But how long have I been studying and how long have you been studying…"

Lin Qingyu said, "To me, these words are no different from Chinese characters. When I look at this paper, it's like I'm reading a Chinese test paper for the third graders."

Jiang Xing was silent for a full half minute. He then suddenly grabbed Lin Qingyu's hand and said sincerely, "I've truly wronged you by making you my wife."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Shen Huaishi smiled and said, "If Qingyu were to take the Dayu's imperial examination, he would definitely take first place."

While Jiang Xing was proud of his wife, he also felt a little guilty. If he really fails to score higher than Lin Qingyu in the future, would Lin Qingyu not find him handsome anymore?

Lin Qingyu then started to do his math homework. Jiang Xing saw that he was stuck on a geometry problem and felt that he could finally show his skills – he

only had the barest advantage in these subjects that didn't require rote memorization.

Jiang Xing leaned over and pointed the pen tip at the question. "Qingyu, this question is actually not difficult, you just need to draw an auxiliary line between point A and point H…"

Lin Qingyu looked up at him. "You also want to teach me how to do things?"

"…I wouldn't dare."

Jiang Xing slid back to his chair. Lin Qingyu looked down at the geometry problem, and after thinking deeply, he reluctantly made an auxiliary line between point A and point H.

Three minutes before midnight, Jiang Xing sent his dad a Happy New Year message. They were in different time zones but he didn't bother to time it,

simply following the domestic time. His dad replied to him right away.

[Happy New Year. I heard from your aunt that you're dating?]

[En.]

[Will it affect your studies?]

[It won't.]

[Okay, I'll double your living expenses starting this month.]

[No need, I'm not short of money.]

The inheritance left to him by his mother was being managed by a trust while he was yet of age. The monthly pay out was quite substantial.

[It will always come in handy.]

Jiang Xing no longer refused. Who wouldn't want money?

[Thank you, Dad.]

At 11:59, a 60-second countdown appeared on Slim Waist. Both Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi were immersed in the sea of questions and had no intention

of doing anything else. Jiang Xing stared at the numbers outside the window and suddenly exclaimed, “Fuck! Huaishi! Look over there!”

Shen Huaishi’s first reaction was that there was an assassin. He stood up abruptly and looked in the direction Jiang Xing pointed at. “Who is it!”

Jiang Xing’s “Fuck” was full of emotion. Lin Qingyu thought that if it weren’t assassins, it would be aliens. He was about to turn his head to look when his lips were suddenly kissed.

“Happy New Year, Qingyu.”

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Extra Story 20

Jiang Xing's final exam was a city wide's joint exam. He got the first place in the school and the second place in the city, only one point behind the city's first placer. He was reluctantly satisfied with this result, saying that it was not

in vain that he'd been doing homework even during New Year's Eve. Lin Qingyu though was not very satisfied, "Why only second place?"

Jiang Xing defended himself, "The city's first placer is the neighboring school's hold-out academic tyrant. He's been studying a year longer than I have…"

Lin Qingyu sneered. "Excuses. If you'd concentrated more on your homework instead of kissing me all the time, would things have turned out like this?"

"…Let's not talk about this." Jiang Xing took the report card away from Lin Qingyu's hand, "The Lunar New Year is coming soon, how do you want to celebrate our first Chinese New Year in modern times?"

There was only one semester left before the college entrance exams. Thus, winter vacation for senior high school students was limited to only ten days. It starts two days before New Year's Day and they had to be back at school seven days after. They even had to celebrate the Lantern Festival in school. But the Lantern Festival was also the anniversary of his and Lin Qingyu's love – they've been together for five years.

Lin Qingyu asked, "How do modern people generally celebrate the (Lunar) New Year?"

Jiang Xing told him everything — posting Spring Festival couplets, making dumplings, having New Year's Eve dinner, watching the Spring Festival Gala,

giving out red envelopes… Save for watching the Spring Festival Gala, the other customs weren't much different from the Dayu's customs.

Jiang Xing's father had no plans to go back to China for this year's Lunar New Year. His paternal grandparents, maternal grandparents, aunts and uncles all called; several urged Jiang Xing to come over to their houses for the celebration, promising red envelopes if he came. Considering that neither Lin Qingyu nor Shen Huaishi liked lively and boisterous celebrations, Jiang Xing did not hesitate to use hard and soft means to politely decline all these elders who loved him.

For the three boys, getting together to celebrate the Lunar New Years, was somewhat of a challenge. Auntie too went home, so they had to be the ones to handle their own New Year's Eve dinner. Between Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing, one was an ancient young master and the other was a modern young master. Neither had been in the kitchen more than a handful of times in their whole

lives. Shen Huaishi stepped up to undertake the task, saying that he knew a thing or two about cooking.

Jiang Xing asked curiously, “Does the Heavenly Prison Sect teach their members to cook?”

Shen Huaishi nodded. “When shadow guards go out on missions, eating and sleeping in the open air is common. We can’t let ourselves starve to death.”

“Don’t you carry dry rations with you?”

Shen Huaishi smiled and said, “That’s true when we go out alone. But sometimes we travel with our master, and we can’t let the master eat dry rations with us.”

Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing exchanged glances and they simultaneously thought of Shen Huaishi’s former master. Lin Qingyu said, “Cooking in modern times should be much more convenient than in the Dayu. Jiang Xing and I can help you.”

Together, they headed to the mall to buy goods to celebrate the Lunar New Year. Before going into the mall, Jiang Xing bought three cups of milk tea. Three grown boys, holding cups of the milk tea, bought new clothes and shoes before finally heading to the supermarket.

They loaded an entire shopping cart full of snacks and took a little of each type of fruit. In consideration for the kitchen-illiterate, food manufacturers have

launched quick-cook dishes. The ingredients have all been processed so that even the amount of salt and oil needed had been packed in small pouches.

Lin Qingyu said, “It’s so simple and convenient. I feel like even I can cook this.”

“Then would you condescend to cook for us?” Jiang Xing said, “It’s been five years, Qingyu and it seems like you’ve never cooked for me. I even cooked noodles for you once.”

“What’s difficult about this?” Lin Qingyu was unfazed, “Leave it to me.”

Lin Qingyu was determined to cook for Jiang Xing with his own hands so he refused Shen Huaishi’s offer to help. He unpacked the quick-cook dish and was quickly dazed as he stared at the pile of ingredients. He knew that the oil goes in first but what after that? In what order should he put these many ingredients into the pan?

Lin Qingyu couldn’t figure it out, so he had no choice but to ask Jiang Xing and Shen Huaishi, who were putting up paper cutout decorations on the

windows. Jiang Xing said, “There should be step-by-step instructions on the package. You can just follow that.”

Lin Qingyu’s expression froze for a moment and then he said, “Okay.”

Jiang Xing still felt uneasy and so he asked Shen Huaishi to go to the kitchen to have a look. Shen Huaishi couldn’t find Lin Qingyu at first. He was getting puzzled when he suddenly found Lin Qingyu huddled in the corner.

Lin Qingyu was squatting next to the trash can. He had his head tilted, frowning, trying to make out the words on the package he’d thrown into the trash can.

Shen Huaishi then realized what must have happened.

Having prepared the dishes strictly according to the instructions, Lin Qingyu’s dishes came out looking good and quite tasty. Jiang Xing had also a big bag of dumplings. The three of them ate their New Year’s Eve dinner as they watched the Spring Festival Gala.

Lin Qingyu was a native of the capital and could be considered a northerner. For him, dumplings were a must for Lunar New Year. He picked up the steaming hot dumpling fresh out of the pan. He wanted to eat it but stopped, putting it near Jiang Xing’s mouth, saying, “Jiang Xing, blow this for me.”

Shen Huaishi suddenly realized what Jiang Xing meant when he often sighed about “How is my wife so cute?”. Before, he never understood. To him, Lin

Qingyu was cool, elegant and lofty. How could the word “cute” possibly be used to describe Lin Qingyu?

But now, he finally discovered Lin Qingyu’s cute side. Did this mean that he could now be considered one of Lin Qingyu’s closest friends?

Jiang Xing didn’t have much interest in the Spring Festival Gala and he just watched it casually. On the other hand, the two from the Dayu were absolutely engrossed in watching it. While watching one of the folk performances, Lin Qingyu heard the sound of the erhu and thought of something. “Jiang Xing.”

“Hm?”

“You said that when you were a child, your mother asked you to learn two musical instruments, one traditional and one western. So besides the erhu, what other musical instrument do you know how to play?”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Guess.”

Lin Qingyu was speechless. “Back then, you asked me to guess your name, now, you’re asking me to guess what western musical instruments you play? Can’t you just tell me?”

“I can’t.” Jiang Xing said feeling quite justified, “I’m good at only a few things. If I tell you outright, how can I surprise you in the future? Think about it, a lifetime’s pretty long. When we’re seventy or eighty, wouldn’t you feel

pleasantly surprised if I suddenly come out and put on a performance for you?"

Lin Qingyu said coldly, "No."

Lin Qingyu was a curious person. Jiang Xing refused to tell him so he had to find a way to get the answer. After watching the Spring Festival Gala, the three went back to their rooms. Jiang Xing saw Lin Qingyu doodling and drawing on the tablet and asked, "What are you doing, Baobei?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "I'm figuring out what kind of musical instrument you play."

Jiang Xing just laughed. "Do you have to be so serious about it?"

"Yes." Lin Qingyu looked at the list of western musical instruments, "Since your mother forced you to choose two to learn, given your personality, you definitely wouldn't have chosen one that's too difficult. We can exclude the clarinet, piano and others like it. Secondly, so long as you can sit, you will never stand. So you wouldn't have chosen an instrument that needs to be

played while standing. Also, you wouldn't have chosen an instrument that is too heavy…"

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu looked up, saw Jiang Xing was holding a gift box and asked, "What's that?"

Jiang Xing said, "My cousin knows I'm seeing someone so she said she wanted to establish a good relationship with her siblings in advance. This is her New Year's gift to you."

Lin Qingyu was thus distracted. "For me?"

"Yeah, should we open it and have a look?"

"Alright."

Jiang Xing opened the gift box, glanced at it and closed it immediately. Lin Qingyu asked suspiciously, "What?"

Jiang Xing appeared embarrassed. "She gifted you things that girls like." He hadn't told his family that his wife was a man. Everyone just assumed he was dating a girl.

"It doesn't matter." Lin Qingyu said, "What matters is her good intentions. Let

me see."

Pei Zhiqi was very generous to her future sibling, giving her a lipstick and a piece of clothing. Jiang Xing said, "No wonder she suddenly asked me about your height and weight…"

Lin Qingyu originally thought that Pei Zhiqi had given him a blue robe but when he unfolded it, he realized that the style of the dress was quite unique,

with slits going up the thighs. It was a stule he'd never before seen in the Dayu or in modern times.

Jiang Xing gave a "tsk" sound. "She sure knows how to tease. Qingyu, this is a cheongsam."

"Cheongsam?" Lin Qingyu touched the exquisite embroidery on the dress, "It combines both classic and modern beauty. Not bad."

Jiang Xing smiled and said, "Do you want to wear it?"

Lin Qingyu asked back, "Do you want me to wear it?"

Jiang Xing was taken aback, his Adam's apple bobbed. "I don't… But if you want to wear it, I can…"

Lin Qingyu chuckled lightly. "Leave it be for now."

After having a look at the dress, Lin Qingyu then took the lipstick and opened it. It was a bright red lipstick. "Is this the rouge used by modern women?" Lin Qingyu scratched a line across his hand, trying to smell the spices used in the

lipstick. “If we can bring this thing back to the Dayu, it will definitely be widely sought after by women.”

Jiang Xing shook himself out of his fantasy of the beauty in cheongsam. He said, “Some lipsticks can be used by men too. Do you want to try it?”

Lin Qingyu thought for a while. “Alright, I’d like to know how it feels when applied.” After all, this wasn’t his first time using rouge.

Jiang Xing said, “Let me help you.”

Lin Qingyu faced Jiang Xing, his lips parted slightly, waiting for the touch of lipstick. Jiang Xing moved slowly and carefully, applying only a thin layer. But this color was simply too red. Just this barest application already turned Lin Qingyu’s lips cherry red.

Jiang Xing suddenly remembered his third wedding night with Lin Qingyu. Lin Qingyu had worn a bright red wedding dress and his lips too had been this fiery red.

Lin Qingyu noticed Jiang Xing’s intense burning gaze. Before he had time to say anything, Jiang Xing was already kissing his freshly painted lips.

This kiss was that of a grown adult man, carrying with it the taste of danger. Lin Qingyu was carried onto the bed, his shirt was lifted up and the young

man's hands kept rubbing against his waist He reached out to push, but was grabbed had his wrist grabbed instead.

"I'll just hug you and do nothing else." Halfway through his words, Jiang Xing felt that something was wrong. He added, "Although my words may sound like I'm deceiving you into sleeping with me, I really can hold back, believe me."

…It's over, he's done for. Why was it that the more he said, the more he sounded like a scumbag?

"It has nothing to do with you." Lin Qingyu turned his head and said softly, "I'm afraid I won't be able to hold back."

Jiang Xing's breathing tightened. He immediately quit talking nonsense and kissed him again.

On the first day of the New Year, both Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing put on new clothes; the same style of hooded sweater, but different colors. Lin Qingyu's

was white while Jiang Xing's was black. Lin Qingyu took out the red envelope he'd prepared in advance and handed it to Jiang Xing. "New Year's money."

Jiang Xing was a little surprised. "For me?"

"Right now, I'm older than you, so I have to be the one to give you New Year's money."

Jiang Xing took the red envelope and said with a smile, "It's so thick."

"I earned it myself."

"How did you earn it?"

Lin Qingyu said, "How can I make money in the modern world? Naturally, by relying on my face. Some shop bought the right to use the photos taken of me at the Hanfu Festival."

"Sure enough, you'll never go hungry if you've got a pretty face." Jiang Xing said, "Since I've received your red envelope, it's only right that I give you my New Year's greetings."

"Alright, get on with it then."

Jiang Xing took two steps back, cupped his hands before his chest and bowed.

“”First, a thousand years to langjun and second, to qieshen, perpetual health.”.”

Lin Qingyu smiled, and replied, “Third, like the swallows perched on roof beams, may we see each other year after year.”

They wore their hair short, wore modern clothes and saluted each other as they did in the Dayu.

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Extra Story 21

Before the new term, Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi took the transfer exam. When Lin Qingyu came out of the examination room, he immediately saw Jiang Xing waiting at the door.

Jiang Xing said with a relaxed tone, “How did you do in the exam?”

“Fair.” Lin Qingyu said, “Where’s Huaishi?”

After a while, Shen Huaishi, looking dejected, found the two of them. Because he was so depressed, he forgot to change their forms of address, “Your Majesties placed such high hopes on me. I didn’t know how to do a few of the questions…”

Jiang Xing comforted him, “It’s just a few questions. That’s already pretty good.” Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi have only been studying for less than half

a year. That Shen Huashi performed like this in the exam was quite normal. It was Lin Qingyu who was abnormal.

Shen Huaishi showed a wry smile. “I don’t think I passed the exam.”

Jiang Xing was already prepared. “Huaishi, you like sports a lot, don’t you?”

Shen Huaishi didn’t know why Jiang Xing was asking him this. He answered, “This is but natural.”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “Then don’t panic. You guys, come with me.”

The three of them arrived at the sports field, where the PE teacher was leading the sports students through their routine training. The PE Rep in Jiang Xing’s class specialized in the high jump but because he did nothing but eat and gain weight during the Lunar New Year break, he was currently being scolded quite severely by the PE teacher. Lin Qingyu had a mask on. He could hear the teacher’s roar even from a distance. “And you want to be admitted to a sports university?!”

Jiang Xing patted Shen Huaishi on the shoulder. “It’s your turn to show your stuff.”

Jiang Xing had bought some sports drinks in advance. He gave one to the PE Rep and another to the PE teacher. The teacher looked at Jiang Xing, eyes

filled with regret and unwillingness. “Jiang Xing, are you really not going to join the school team? The swim team always has a spot open for you.”

Jiang Xing smiled and said, “No, thank you, Teacher. Swimming’s really tiring.”

The teacher rolled his eyes. “Quit that already. What about the basketball team? I saw you playing basketball last time.”

“To be honest, the only sport I’m passionate about right now is fishing.”

Teacher:”……”

Jiang Xing got to the point. “Teacher, I have a friend who I would like to recommend to you…”

Shen Huaishi didn’t even need to show his stuff. The teacher took one look at his perfect athletic figure and smooth muscle lines and it was like he’d discovered a hidden treasure. One touch and he was filled with excitement.

Jiang Xing was not at all surprised by this. – The majestic leader of the Heavenly Prison Sect had been subjected through hellish training since he was a child. He was battle-trained and experienced. The high jump was mere child’s play to him. With this specialty and another semester of study, it wouldn’t be difficult for Shen Huaishi to get into a good university. If one were

so bold as to dream a bit bigger, he might even win honors for the country in the future.

For the last two days of the holiday, Shen Huaishi was pestered by the PE teacher into attending training, which left the young couple with time alone together. Jiang Xing decided to take advantage of the holiday to celebrate their fifth anniversary in advance.

Having just finished the exam, Lin Qingyu too wanted to be salted fish for a couple of days and so acquiesced to be taken out. Modern people's idea of celebrating their anniversary is nothing more than finding a nice restaurant to have a meal or going out to see a movie. But Jiang Xing wanted to go fishing.

"When I was emperor, there was a pond in the palace and I could still fish occasionally. Now that I'm back in modern times, I've never fished even once."

Lin Qingyu looked at the wronged and aggrieved high school student and didn't know whether to laugh or cry. "Where do you want to go fishing?"

Jiang Xing had done his homework and chose a homestay located in a small forest, known as the Secret Garden. The cottage was hidden in a forest, giving off strong fairy tale vibes. It was surrounded by nature with streams and ponds but was also equipped with modern amenities like a bath, a bar, a restaurant and even a ranch.

Jiang Xing's family driver took the two of them to the homestay. The owner welcomed them warmly, making polite conversation as he showed them

around the place. “May I ask, are you two friends or…”

Jiang Xing said, “We’re a couple.”

The owner smiled knowingly, “We have complimentary cake and roses for couples who stay with us.”

“In that case, can you write ‘Happy 5th Anniversary’ on the cake?”

“Fifth anniversary?” The owner was stunned, “If I remember correctly, it said on your ID cards that…”

Jiang Xing was very honest. “You remember correctly.”

The owner was taken aback. “This…” Should he call the police?

Lin Qingyu glanced at Jiang Xing and said to the owner, “He’s joking with you.”

He smiled and said, half-truth and half-lie, “Am I?”

The owner was more willing to trust decent handsome guys over handsome jokers. Panicked over a false alarm, he wiped the sweat off his brow and

continued to introduce, “We also provide guests with fishing gear and use of a grill and campfire…”

Jiang Xing took the fishing gear and headed straight for the stream not far from the homestay. The stream was crystal clear. The air was refreshingly cool without being too cold. Having lived in the city for a long time, occasionally

coming to a small forest to experience the slow life and get away from it all was also a different kind of pleasure.

“An unsurpassably clear stream; in this lonely spot, a cloud as your only friend.” Lin Qingyu said, “How did you find such a place?”

Jiang Xing skillfully placed the bait on the hook. “It was recommended by a classmate. He said this place is superb, only that…”

“Only that what?”

Jiang Xing lowered his voice. “When he was sleeping at night, he saw something strange.”

Lin Qingyu felt that Jiang Xing was probably pulling his leg and so he said lightly, “Oh.”

Jiang Xing said, “Aren’t you curious what it was?”

“A ghost, probably.”

Jiang Xing was speechless.

It was getting dark. Lin Qingyu asked the owner to set up the grill by the stream. Jiang Xing was fishing while he was preparing dinner. When he wasn’t

sure whether it was cooked or not, he would feed Jiang Xing a bite.

Jiang Xing has been fishing in the Dayu for a few years and had some skills. After an hour, he'd managed to catch one loach, a small one. Seeing him

thoroughly enjoying himself, seeming not at all to tire, Lin Qingyu understood what it meant to 'suck but still want to play'.

This male high schooler was obviously good at so many sports but he only loves fishing. What can he do but accompany him?

During this period, Ke Tang sent Lin Qingyu a WeChat message, asking him if he'd given more consideration into becoming a model to earn extra money.

Ke Tang: [A lot of Hanfu stores have seen your photos and want to work with you.]

Lin Qingyu: [No need. I probably won't have much time in the future.]

Ke Tang used this topic to start chatting with Lin Qingyu. When she found out that Lin Qingyu was out fishing with his boyfriend, she sent a series of question marks.

Ke Tang: [What the hell? Fishing!? Isn't dating a high schooler all about doing homework together, visiting food stalls and handing him water while he's playing basketball?]

Lin Qingyu: [Maybe but my male high schooler's different.]

After three hours of fishing, the two made their way back with their "bountiful harvest". The moonlight was dim; birds called to each other in the woods. Lin

Qingyu saw an unusual beam of light shining through the dense forest. He stopped and asked, “What’s that?”

Jiang Xing too was puzzled. “I don’t know. Do you want to go and have a look?”

“Alright.”

The two walked towards the beam of light. It was too dark under their feet, so Jiang Xing turned on the flashlight of his mobile phone to illuminate their way. “Qingyu, you walk behind me.”

They were getting closer and closer to the light and Lin Qingyu saw the silhouette of a huge monster. Suddenly, a gust of evil wind blew by and sent

the fallen leaves flying. A low sobbing sound seemed to mix in with the rustling of the leaves.

Lin Qingyu asked, “Did you hear that?”

“I only heard the wind.”

Lin Qingyu said softly, “Are there any other guests in the homestay?”

Jiang Xing said, “No, the owner said it’s just the two of us today.”

Lin Qingyu’s face was grave. “Could it be a lonely ghost or some lost soul?”

Jiang Xing smiled. “There’s no such thing as lost souls.”

Lin Qingyu looked pointedly at him, saying nothing.

Jiang Xing asked in confusion, “What are you looking at me for?”

Lin Qingyu said, “If there’s no lost souls in the world then how did you die and come back to life three times?”

Jiang Xing was momentarily taken aback. “You’ve got a point there. You go back to the homestay and I’ll go take a look.”

Lin Qingyu couldn’t stand it. “Don’t say such stupid things. If you want to have

a look, we'll go together."

Jiang Xing hesitated. "But…"

Lin Qingyu took his hand and walked forward. "Let's go."

The two continued to move forward and when they were only a few steps away from the behemoth, bright lights suddenly came on.

Lin Qingyu instinctively raised his hand to block the light. He was only able to see straight after his eyes adjusted.

——A spotless silver coupe, the same color as the moonlight, was parked in the wooded clearing.

While Lin Qingyu was still dazed, Jiang Xing walked up to him, raised his fist and unfurled it. A car key dropped, hanging off his finger.

"Qingyu, this is for you."

Lin Qingyu understood. He found the situation both infuriating and funny. "You played me."

Jiang Xing smiled innocently and brightly. "I didn't, you were the one who mentioned ghosts. I said there's no such thing but you still refuted me."

"Can't you just give me gifts properly? Why do you have to make it a surprise

every time?"

Jiang Xing thought for a while, "Probably because you look so cute whenever I surprise you." He put the car keys in Lin Qingyu's hand, "Allow me to give you in advance my gift for our fifth anniversary. Don't say I didn't prepare any presents on the day itself, alright? Do you like it?"

Lin Qingyu's chest turned warm and his heart was beating fast. They were already an old married couple but Jiang Xing could still get him to react like this. Was this the charm of a surprise?

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. "I like it."

Jiang Xing deliberately turned his smile wicked. "Then I'll have to trouble you to drive me to and from school from now on."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

As expected of Jiang Xing; a single sentence was all it took to vanish half of this warm, fuzzy feeling.

Even with this gift, Lin Qingyu, of course, still walked to school – their apartment was only a few steps away from the school. He'd be crazy to drive that short distance.

Lin Qingyu's score was way above what was needed for the transfer. In order to properly nurture his talent, he was assigned to a class with a renowned and

reputable teacher. He winded up in the same class as Jiang Xing. Shen Huaishi's score was not bad and he too passed. He'd also captured the PE teacher's heart with his athletic prowess and successfully enrolled as a sports-track student.

Jiang Xing was like the father of a child who just entered elementary school. He helped them buy schoolbags, school supplies and even picked out a bunch of tutorial books for them, refusing any thanks. On the day the three of them headed to school together, Jiang Xing was feeling extremely pleased. From now on, he would be able to cling to his wife 24 hours a day.

He was simply hopeless. Save for sleeping, all he wanted was to cling to his wife all the time.

When he arrived at school, the first thing Jiang Xing did was to go to the classroom and 'do away' with his deskmate. Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi went to report to the Academic Affairs Office. After going through the admission procedures, they were taken away by their respective class advisors.

The class advisor was an excellent teacher with twenty-five years of teaching experience. Looking at the boy beside her, she couldn't help feeling a little worried. Won't such a good-looking young man transferring to their class affect the students' ability to study?… Having Jiang Xing was already enough

for to cause her headaches and now there's another one. Why did her class have to have such handsome guys?

Before entering the classroom, Lin Qingyu took off his mask and put it away. During the morning self-study, the classroom was noisy and became even noisier when the class advisor walked in. Chen Zihao's voice was particularly loud. When they found that there was another person behind the teacher, they all stopped talking simultaneously.

The girls exchanged secret glances while the boys were even more excited than they were. A boy who usually liked to joke around with the teachers asked, "Teacher, who is this pretty boy?"

"He's a new transfer student to our class." The head teacher turned to Lin Qingyu, "Introduce yourself to everyone."

Lin Qingyu's self-introduction was only "Hi everyone, my name is Lin Qingyu" but it was enough to cause a commotion among his classmates. The boy seated at the table before Jiang Xing's, turned his head and gave Jiang Xing a sly smile,

“Jiang Xing, looks like you’ve got competition for your spot as campus heartthrob.”

Jiang Xing looked at Lin Qingyu, his eyes sparkling, “Oh?”

The PE Rep muttered, “Why does he look kinda familiar…?”

The class advisor looked around the classroom and saw that the seat next to Jiang Xing was empty. She asked, “Jiang Xing, what happened to your seatmate?”

Jiang Xing said, “He abandoned me and said he didn’t want to sit with me anymore.”

The former deskmate kept silent, pissed but not daring to speak.

The class advisor said, “Then you can go and sit with Jiang Xing.”

Lin Qingyu threw Jiang Xing a pointed look. He walked towards his seat. The class advisor continued on behind him, “Today is the Lantern Festival. You’ve all enjoyed your New Year’s break so you should all be feeling refreshed. There are only four months left before the college entrance examinations. There isn’t much time left. Success comes from persistence and persistence creates miracles. Hard work will always win…”

Lin Qingyu sat down beside Jiang Xing. Jiang Xing acted as though he were meeting him for the first time. He smiled politely. “Hello, new classmate, I’m

Jiang Xing."

He'd been kissing him in bed last night and now he's putting on a show again.

Lin Qingyu went along with this male high schooler's performance. "Hello."

"We'll be seatmates from now on, please look after me."

Jiang Xing extended his hand.

Lin Qingyu held Jiang Xing's hand and said, "Please take care of me as well."

The two clasped hands for a couple of seconds and Lin Qingyu felt something slightly cool against his palm.

He withdrew his hand suspiciously to see a platinum ring inlaid with diamonds on his palm, shining brightly under the fluorescent lamp of the classroom.

——End of the full text

The author has something to say:

They will stay in our world for seven years and then they will return to the Dayu to continue their careers after getting their degrees~

The full text of "Three Married Salted Fish" ends here. Please give me a five-

stars if you liked this book. It will make me more motivated to write the side story “Married Four Times to Salted Fish”! ! !

Well, see you next time

Translator’s Note: Hello~! This is the official end of Married Thrice to Salted Fish. (If you check the novel page of the raw, Chapter 140 is the last. And I do think this is a pretty elegant ending to these extra chapters.) But wait! The author isn’t quite done. She might not have written Married Four Times to Salted Fish but she did write (as of June 2023) seven extra chapters (she made a separate novel page to house these). But they aren’t really full blown extra chapters, they’re more like snippets. I’ve decided to translate those as well and I will be releasing those, one every day, starting Monday next week (they’ll be chapters 141-147). So, we don’t have to say good bye just yet. =) However, please allow me to thank everyone for reading and for leaving all these comments and for all the kofi’s/coffees. I might not reply to most comments but I’ve read (I think) all of them.

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New Year Greetings

For their first year in modern times, Jiang Xing lived a life of three with Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi. Knowing that Lin Qingyu didn't like too lively celebrations. Jiang Xing found excuses to postpone large family gatherings.

However, the elders closest to him still wanted him to visit; the aunt who doted on him the most being one of them.

On the second day of the New Year, Jiang Xing brought Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi to his aunt's house. It was Jiang Xing's cousin, Pei Zhiqi, who opened the door for them.

Pei Zhiqi had on glasses and was wearing loose, thick pajamas. She hadn't washed her hair for at least three days — What a joke. It's just her younger brother coming to visit. Why even bother washing her hair?

However, when she opened the door — she was well aware that her cousin was a handsome guy but where did the other two handsome guys come from?!

Jiang Xing introduced her to Lin Qingyu, "Qingyu, this is my aunt's daughter…"

Before he could even finish speaking, Lin Qingyu felt a whirlwind fly by. When he came back to his senses, Jiang Xing's cousin had disappeared.

The three boys looked at each other.

Half an hour later, the female college student with exquisitely applied makeup, wearing a windbreaker and boots, came sauntering down the stairs and begun

serving fruit and snacks to the guests.

Jiang Xing: "…There's no need, really."

Pei Zhiqi ignored him and turned to chat with the guests.

"Are you Jiang Xing's classmates?"

"That's right."

"Huaishi, you don't look too well?"

Shen Huaishi was so plagued by motion sickness that he hardly looked human. He said weakly, "Replying to the Eldest Princess, I, I am a little motion sick."

"Ah, you really do seem dizzy. Here, have some more hot water." Pei Zhiqi turned to Lin Qingyu, "Qingyu, what do you usually like to do?"

Lin Qingyu thought for a while and said, "I like reading."

"Reading? I also like reading. It will still be a while yet before dinner. Would you like to see my study?"

"Okay." Lin Qingyu turned to Jiang Xing, hesitated for a moment and added a little stiffly, "Thank you, Jiejie."

Pei Zhiqi brought her younger brothers to her study room and pointed to

several fully stocked bookshelves. She said, “These are all my books. Feel free to read any that you’d like. Oh, the books in the innermost row might not be suitable…”

Pei Zhiqi was halfway through her introduction, when her mother called her downstairs to help in the kitchen. Jiang Xing said, “I’ll go and help out too. Baobei, would you like to stay here and read?”

“I can also help.” Lin Qingyu hesitated, “Although I don’t know how to cook, I can be eye-candy.”

“From where are you picking up these words?” Jiang Xing said with a smile, “There’s no reason to put guests to work. Huaishi, please keep watch here. I’ll call you when the meal is ready.”

Jiang Xing headed to the kitchen to help his aunt and cousin prepare the ingredients. His aunt asked curiously, “Don’t your friends need to visit their family during the New Years?”

“No need,” Jiang Xing said, “They’re black householders and they have no relatives here.”

His aunt was moved to pity. “It’s the Lunar New Year’s… I’ll give them big red envelopes later.”

The meal was almost ready. Jiang Xing went back to the second floor and pushed open the half-opened door of the study, “Qingyu, Huaishi, it’s time to

eat…" Seeing the expressions on the two's faces, Jiang Xing's heart skipped a beat, "It's time to eat— — are you all right?"

Lin Qingyu and Shen Huaishi were seated side by side on the sofa, holding a book each. Both of them had the same expression of shock and bewilderment on their faces. Their three views seemed to have been subverted and they were about to split apart.

Lin Qingyu's voice trembled slightly, "In this place, can men also give birth?"

"Ah?" Jiang Xing's eyes fell on the books each of them had. One was "After Being Marked by the Campus Heartthrob, I Bore his Cub [ABO]" and the other, "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch."

Jiang Xing: "…"

After a strange prolonged silence, Jiang Xing's phone buzzed. It was a WeChat message from Pei Zhiqi:

[I just forgot to mention that the last row of the bookshelf are the physical books I've collected for many years. They're not suitable for them to read. Please tell them not to read any of those. Especially "Huai's Refusal of the Monarch" since the protagonist and supporting character happen to have the same name as they do. It'll be a huge blow to them if they see it and it might affect their mood.]

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Motion Sickness

The three of them headed home after dinner at Jiang Xing's aunt's house. As the only person with a driver's license, Lin Qingyu sat in the driver's seat, Jiang Xing sat in the co-pilot and Shen Huaishi sat in the back.

While waiting for the traffic light to change, Lin Qingyu looked in the rearview mirror and saw Shen Huaishi looking pale and dazed, looking as though he still hadn't gotten over his shock.

Lin Qingyu called out to him, "Huaishi?"

"This subordinate…" As soon as Shen Huaishi opened his mouth, a wave of nausea hit. His stomach gurgled and he quickly covered his mouth.

When the light turned green, Lin Qingyu began driving and said casually,

“Could it be that you’re in heat?”

Jiang Xing didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. “Qingyu, didn’t I explain it to you just now? The so-called ABO is just a setting in a novel. It doesn’t exist in the real world.”

Lin Qingyu said slowly, “For people in this world, “Huai’s Refusal of the Monarch” is just a novel. But Huaishi and I still came from there to here. How can you be sure that the ABO world in the book doesn’t exist somewhere?”

Jiang Xing was taken aback for a moment, then suddenly felt terrified at the mere thought of it.

“This subordinate is not in heat.” Shen Huaishi said weakly, “This subordinate is just dizzy, mo-motion sickness.”

After finding out that he easily got motion sickness, Shen Huaishi felt very depressed. He was the dignified leader of the shadow guards, a direct subordinate of the emperor. He’s able to perform astounding feats, can run through eaves and up walls as though he were flying. He was like a ghost at night. And he actually gets motion sickness! After sitting in a car for ten

minutes, he starts to feel dizzy, nauseated and so weak. How is he supposed to protect the Emperor and Empress?

Jiang Xing looked back at Shen Huaishi's half-dead appearance and said, "How about I pull over and let you rest?"

Shen Huaishi shook his head, gritted his teeth and said, "How can we waste Your Majesties time because of my matter?"

At this time they happened to passing by a park, Lin Qingyu stopped the car in the parking lot, directly ignoring his nonsense. "Go on. Out the car and get a breather."

Shen Huaishi really couldn't hold on anymore. He opened the car door, stepped outside and retched.

Jiang Xing watched and shook his head. "That is absolutely miserable. Next time we take Huaishi out, let's take the subway."

The Emperor and Empress of their nation accompanied Shen Huaishi to catch a breather in the park. Once Shen Huaishi recovered, he felt very embarrassed,

“Your Majesties, please go home first. This subordinate will make his own way back.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Don’t say such stupid things. Do you know how far this place is from home?”

Shen Huaishi said, “I can use Qinggong to fly back home.”

Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing looked at each other and said in unison, “Use what to fly back home?”

“Although this subordinates may be in a different world, I dared not allow my skills to go rusty.” If you were to ask what Shen Huaishi has the most confidence in, it was his skills.

Jiang Xing thought that Shen Huashi was joking and said with a smile, “Then fly and show me.”

“This subordinate obeys!”

That very instant, a black shadow flashed before Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing’s eyes and Shen Huaishi disappeared. All they heard was the rustling of leaves. They looked up and saw that Shen Huaishi had landed firmly among the branches of a big tree.

It was just a couple of days into the Lunar New Year and the city was somewhat deserted. Even the subways weren’t crowded. Although it wasn’t yet

late, there were hardly any pedestrians in the park. But Shen Huaishi was up so high and there were surveillance cameras in the park. It was hard for him not to be noticed.

Jiang Xing choked. He turned to ask Lin Qingyu, “When you introduced Huaishi to modern common sense, did you tell him not to fly around?”

Lin Qingyu asked back, “Is flying around against the law?”

Jiang Xing was speechless. He raised his head and said to Shen Huaishi. “You fly very well but don’t fly next time – come down quickly.”

When Shen Huaishi landed to the ground, Lin Qingyu’s face suddenly changed and his eyes widened slightly. “The police are here.”

Jiang Xing looked at the policeman who was walking towards them, yelling loudly. He sighed, “Oh, how troublesome.”

Lin Qingyu took a few steps back, hiding behind Jiang Xing. He firmly grasped Jiang Xing’s arm. With wary eyes, he looked over Jiang Xing’s shoulder. He said softly, “Jiang Xing, do you think he has a gun on him?”

“I don’t know.” Jiang Xing pondered and said, “But he must at least have an electroshock weapon.”

Lin Qingyu hid deeper behind Jiang Xing. “Laogong, I don’t want to be

shocked."

"Oh, now it's Laogong." Jiang Xing couldn't help laughing, "When Empress Lin was in the Dayu, he wasn't afraid of anything; even raising poisonous snakes and scorpions. Are you so afraid of the police?"

Lin Qingyu frowned, displeased, "It isn't the same. How can feudal society and modern society be compared? — The Qing Dynasty is long dead."

Jiang Xing was helpless. "Are you the modern person or am I, huh, Qingyu?"

The police strode up to the three of them and said seriously, "Were you climbing trees just now?"

Shen Huaishi knew that one must bear responsibility for one's actions. Though "disabled" he was mentally strong. "I am the only one who climbed the tree. It has nothing to do with these two."

The police looked at them. "Please show me your ID cards."

Jiang Xing said, "What if I don't have my ID card with me?"

"Your ID number will do."

The three of them reported their ID numbers and the policeman found nothing unusual. He asked, "Tell me, why are you climbing trees in the park at

night?"

"May I ask," Lin Qingyu said, feeling guilty and maintaining courtesy when addressing the police, "But which law stipulates that tourists are not allowed to climb trees in the park?"

The police sternly said, "Climbing trees is a dangerous. Not to mention that he was climbing public property!"

Jiang Xing hurriedly apologized, "I'm sorry, Uncle, these two are new here and don't know much about the law. I apologize to you on their behalf."

The policeman couldn't understand. "You're a minor. Why are you apologizing for these two adults? Who are they?"

Jiang Xing had on a sincere and honest expression as he said, "Do you read a lot of novels? Specifically time-travel novels?"

The police uncle was silent for a moment and then said, "You better come with me to the station and I'll arrange for you to take a drug test."

"Actually, I was joking just now." Jiang Xing smiled politely, "The truth is, although I'm not yet an adult, I'm mentally older than these two. — Trust me."

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Sickness

After school started, it rained continuously for a week and the temperature hovered near of zero. The room was so damp that water seeped from the walls.

Under this kind of magical attack of damp and cold, ancient people who lived in the north of the Dayu all the year round would routinely fall ill. — That is to say that it was the leader of the Heavenly Prison Sect, Shen Huaishi, young and strong, skilled in martial arts and who was more muscled than Jiang Xing who fell it.

Shen Huaishi took a sick leave for the day and Lin Qingyu rushed home to take care of him as soon as school was over. Jiang Xing was called to the office by the class advisor because he he'd foregone his English homework to sleep

early last night. His wife, who was now the class' English representative didn't cover for him at all.

Shen Huaishi was dazed from the fever and was lying in bed, in deep slumber. Lin Qingyu took his temperature and pulse for him. He then put a cold towel on his forehead and then stayed by his side.

Not long after, the Emperor of the Dayu, having finished his homework in the class advisor's office, came home. His winter school uniform was dripping wet

from the rain. He threw his schoolbag on the sofa and walked into Shen Huaishi's room. "How is Huaishi?"

Lin Qingyu made a "shh" gesture and said softly, "He just fell asleep."

Jiang Xing touched Shen Huaishi's forehead. "It seems that his fever hasn't subsided yet? Poor boy."

Shen Huaishi felt the coolness of Jiang Xing's palm. He moved his lips and mumbled in his sleep, "Father, mother…"

The two looked at each other, their expressions similar, with the subtlety between husband and wife.

"It'll take too long to reduce the fever naturally." Lin Qingyu said, "Go to the pharmacy downstairs to buy some medicine. Remember to take an umbrella."

Jiang Xing picked up his phone and went downstairs. He chose several cold medicines and antipyretics at the pharmacy. As he was checking out, the cashier told him with a smile on his face, "Sir, today the pharmacy is offering a discount of 20 yuan when you spend 120. You're already at 80 yuan. Would you like to add a little more?"

For a moment, Jiang Xing couldn't think of any medicines that were missing at home. He looked around and his eyes finally fell on a small box by the cash

register. He picked up a box, his movements very natural. “Then I’ll take this too.”

The cashier’s smile froze, silently looking at Jiang Xing’s high school uniform.

Jiang Xing looked at the cashier, a frank and open expression on his face. “Just something to add to the bill.”

Back home, Jiang Xing and Lin Qingyu gave Shen Huaishi the antipyretic medicine. The medicine took effect quickly and Shen Huaishi started sweating out the fever not long after. His sleep became much more peaceful.

At night, Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing were lying on the bed wearing the same style of flannel pajamas, playing with their mobile phones and chatting from time to time, just like an old married couple. Lin Qingyu looked at the weather forecast for the next few days and said, displeased, “The temperature won’t rise until next week.”

“Cherish the current winter.” Jiang Xing said while playing Fight the Landlord, “When the temperature rises, it’ll usher in a summer that lasts for eight to nine months.”

Lin Qingyu wasn’t used too the humidity and cold of the south. Even with the heater turned on and auntie bringing out the thick quilts for them, it was still

cold in the bed. He asked Jiang Xing, “Should I ask Auntie to change to a thicker quilt?”

“This…” Male high schoolers naturally run hot and he already found the thick quilt he was sleeping under somewhat hot. “Okay.”

Lin Qingyu caught Jiang Xing’s hesitation and asked, “Don’t you feel cold?”

“It’s cold. Better change it right away.”

Lin Qingyu saw through Jiang Xing’s lies. “Liar, you don’t feel cold at all.”

Jiang Xing just laughed: “You don’t have to worry about me, you can change it if you want.”

Lin Qingyu said, “Since our perception of hot and cold is out of sync, we can just sleep under separate quilts…”

“Then I’d rather die of heat.”

After turning off the lights, the two slept together. Not long after sleeping, Jiang Xing began to feel extremely hot and he quietly stretched his hands out

of the quilt. Feeling the movement of the person next to him, Lin Qingyu pulled the quilt off slightly.

Jiang Xing asked, “Baobei, what are you doing?”

Lin Qingyu said: “Don’t you feel hot? I’m letting a little of the heat escape.”

Jiang Xing was taken aback for a moment. “Aren’t you cold?”

“Yes, but you’re hot.”

Jiang Xing’s Adam’s apple bobbed. He said hoarsely, “Qingyu…”

Lin Qingyu was puzzled. “What’s wrong?”

“You’re actually willing to let out the heat from under the quilt for me.” Jiang Xing was very pleased, “You really like me.”

This reason for being moved… as expected of a salted fish.

Lin Qingyu wanted to laugh a little. He said deliberately, “It’s fine. It’s just a normal kind of like.”

Jiang Xing smiled and leaned over. “Well but I like you very much…”

Before Lin Qingyu could speak, he found himself surrounded by the scent of

this male high schooler.

The temperature in bed was getting higher and higher and Lin Qingyu no longer felt cold. At this time, a hand opened the drawer of the bedside table.

Lin Qingyu looked at what Jiang Xing was holding and raised his eyebrows.

Jiang Xing sat on the bed, quilt over his head. He smiled at Lin Qingyu, a small packet between his fingers. “We can do bad things secretly. If we don’t tell others, Baobei won’t be caught by the police.”

The two of them have been sleeping together in the same bed for so long and the most they’ve done is make out which always left them unsatisfied. Lin Qingyu couldn’t help being tempted but Shen Huaishi was still sick in bed in

the other room. Having fun like this while someone was sick…it would be too irresponsible.

Lin Qingyu took a deep breath and said calmly, “Sorry, I don’t really want to.”

“Ah?” Jiang Xing was so surprised. “Why?!”

“After we do something bad, I’ll have to get up and clean up. It’s so cold, I don’t want to get out of bed.”

Jiang Xing was silent for three seconds and then asked uncertainly, “Are you serious?”

“En.”

Jiang Xing’s defenses broke in an instant, “What the fuck, Qingyu! You’ve changed! You weren’t like this before!”

Lin Qingyu faintly spit out, “Is this the pot calling the kettle black?”

Jiang Xing: “…”

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Birthday

The eleventh day of the third lunar month is Lin Qingyu's birthday. This day fell on a weekday and they still had classes. The only time they could celebrate was at night. Jiang Xing spent a lot of money to book a suite in a hot spring hotel. He arranged for a candlelit dinner, birthday cake, massage chairs, the works.

Jiang Xing originally wanted to skip afternoon classes to bring Lin Qingyu there earlier but Lin Qingyu insisted on not skipping any class. The most he'd skip was evening self-study. So when the two arrived at the hotel, it was already long after nightfall.

After getting out of the car, Jiang Xing stretched his arms then turned to ask, "Qingyu, are you tired after driving for so long?"

Lin Qingyu said calmly, "Even if I am, there's nothing to be done about it. Hurry up and get your driver's license when you turn 18 that way I won't get

tired."

"You can't blame me for that." Jiang Xing said, "Then let's have dinner first and then have a soak in the hot spring?"

Lin Qingyu nodded. "Okay."

The candlelit dinner was exquisite and very romantic but to Lin Qingyu, who was once the Empress of a country, there was nothing impressive about it. It was more the male high school student's smile under the candlelight that made him happy.

The male high schooler even gave him a bouquet of roses. It wasn't any rare variety and it was only a small one, but each one was in full bloom. Each had obviously been carefully selected.

"I'm sorry it's not the expensive kind. I bought it with money I earned myself." Jiang Xing said, "It didn't come from the living expenses my father gave me

nor from the proceeds of the fund my mother left me—I earned it through the labor of my own two hands."

The labor of his own two hands?

Lin Qingyu asked curiously, "How did you earn it?"

Jiang Xing slowly said, "By sticking screen protectors."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

"I set up a stall under the bridge and put on 20 pieces of screen protectors for customers to get this bouquet of roses. My hands are sore." Jiang Xing looked at Lin Qingyu expectantly, "Do you like it, Baobei?"

Lin Qingyu lowered his eyes and smiled. He said softly, "Baobei likes it very much."

The selling point of this hotel was its natural hot spring. The water was pure natural hot spring water that bubbled from deep underground. It was known as the "Thousand Year Holy Bath". Lin Qingyu couldn't tell if it was the "holy

bath" but surrounded as it was by a bamboo forest, misty and serene, with a lack of many modern facilities, it had the feel of the Dayu.

Jiang Xing had been the one to choose this hotel. Lin Qingyu didn't know if this was the reason why he'd chosen it.

The two changed into swimming trunks and went downstairs with bathrobes on. Jiang Xing's phone rang suddenly. Seeing the caller ID, he said, depressed, "It's the class advisor."

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Jiang Xing sighed. "She must be calling to ask me why I skipped class. And why I dragged along our class representative who's both good in character and academics to skip class together."

"Go and deal with her." Lin Qingyu said, "I'll wait for you by the hot spring."

While Jiang Xing was confronting the class advisor, Lin Qingyu approached the hotel staff and asked, "Is it possible to reserve the hot spring?"

The staff said, "It is possible but there will be an additional fee."

"You don't need to worry about this small amount of money," Lin Qingyu said,

“My husband has plenty of money.”

The staff smiled and said, “Alright.”

The Emperor of the Dayu, who’d been reprimanded by the class advisor, arrived at the hot spring bath to see his Empress already having a soak. Jiang Xing took off his bathrobe and put it aside. “Qingyu, I’m here.”

Lin Qingyu asked suspiciously, “Why are you still wearing your swimming trunks?”

“I want to soak in the hot spring, Baobei.” Jiang Xing had an ominous premonition, “Aren’t you wearing yours?”

Lin Qingyu said, “In modern times, you don’t need to wear clothes when soaking in the hot springs.”

“Who said that?”

“You did.” The memory was fresh in Lin Qingyu’s mind. “You said it when we were in the Dayu.”

Jiang Xing was momentarily at a loss for words. He remembered that he had indeed lied to Lin Qingyu about that, saying that modern people don’t wear clothes when they go to the hot springs.

Jiang Xing’s expression changed slightly and he said, voice trembling, “Then,

are you wearing yours?"

"Of course not"

Jiang Xing sucked in a breath of cold air and the frantically looked around. "Did anyone see you?"

"A man and a woman were sharing the pool with me just now."

Jiang Xing wished he could slap himself. He stammered out, "Qingyu, you, you…you stay in the water and don't move. I'll get you a pair of swimming trunks right away."

Lin Qingyu finally couldn't hold back anymore and he chuckled softly. "You're so gullible."

Jiang Xing was momentarily dazed and then realized what had happened. "I was tricked."

Lin Qingyu raised his eyebrows. "Have you forgotten? I'm one to hold grudges."

Jiang Xing choked and said, "You hold grudges even against your husband!?"

"I do."

…All right. Jiang Xing jumped into the hot spring. Water splashed everywhere,

“Then allow Zhen to see whether the Empress really is wearing clothes.”

Lin Qingyu didn’t try to dodge and allowed Jiang Xing approach him, saying, “I’ve wasted money, Laogong.”

“Hm?”

“I reserved the hot spring and it cost a lot of money.” Lin Qingyu said, “I’m afraid you’ll be sticking protective screens for 20 years to earn that much money.”

Jiang Xing was momentarily stunned. He then raised his lips in a smile, “I’d be happy to do so.”

Lin Qingyu looked on as the male high schooler lowered his head towards him.

Moonlight reflected on the pool’s surface.

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Weibo Jokes

Two small jokes posted on Weibo before, here we go~

Choosing a major

Lin Qingyu, Jiang Xing and Shen Huaishi performed well in the college entrance examination and their results were very satisfactory. Shen Huaishi was admitted to a sports university in the capital and Lin Qingyu and Jiang Xing had their choice of any major at any domestic university.

Lin Qingyu finally realized his dream in Jiang Xing's hometown, his dream that he hadn't been able to pursue in the Dayu — to attend the nation's best school for medicine.

As for Jiang Xing's major…

"As the ruler of a country, you have to learn a lot." Lin Qingyu flipped through the booklet introducing the different majors and said, "The first is the social

sciences, including economics, political science, law, ethics…etc. The country would benefit greatly."

Jiang Xing: "There'd to be a lot of things to memorize if I took law."

Lin Qingyu continued, "However, mathematics, physics and chemistry are the basic subjects for the development of science. If you learn science and engineering, you would also benefit the people."

Jiang Xing: "En…that does seem to be so."

Lin Qingyu: "Then you should take a double degree."

Jiang Xing: "Ah…"

Shen Huaishi suggested, "Qingyu, as the saying goes, 'For the People, Food is Heaven'. The Dayu relies on agriculture to survive. If he learns agriculture techniques, it might help the Dayu avoid famine."

Lin Qingyu nodded. "That makes sense. In addition, Jiang Xing can learn about urban construction, drainage and water control. It would alleviate the people's suffering from floods."

Jiang Xing: "Then what…"

Lin Qingyu pondered the matter. "I don't know if it is possible to study three or four degrees in the university. But if you can't, you could still sit in for these

classes."

Jiang Xing couldn't bear it anymore and said, "Qingyu, do you really love me?"

Lin Qingyu: "I love you."

Jiang Xing: "…Then shouldn't you ask me what major I want to take?"

Lin Qingyu was taken aback for a moment and he said apologetically, "I'm sorry, I was negligent. — Then, which major do you like?"

Jiang Xing fell into deep thought.

The only things he liked were sleeping and Lin Qingyu. He didn't seem to have any special hobbies.

"I like you," Jiang Xing said with a smile, "So no matter what we study, my dormitory can't be too far away from yours. It would be best if we're in the same dormitory."

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. "So we can sleep on bunk beds again?"

Jiang Xing: "…"

In the end, the choice of majors resulted in each of the three taking double degrees — one that they liked and one that benefited the country and the

people. If one had be exhausted, all of them were to be exhausted.

If “Married Thrice to Salted Fish” happened in modern times

Of course, our Qingyu is still that cold and aloof beauty, a top student of the medical school, with a little dark heart. Though he definitely won’t be poisoning classmates who like to provoke him, he will still silently wish for his stupid classmates to fail the exam.

He then catches the attention of the greasy domineering president (yes, His Royal Highness the Crown Prince), who wants to keep him by his side as a substitute. Naturally, Qingyu would rather die than submit. The president

makes life in school difficult for Qingyu, making it impossible for him to go to school but he's also unable to go home.

In order not to cause trouble for his parents, Qingyu rents an apartment with what little savings he has. He saw rental ad on the Internet and following the address to locate the building.

Standing in front of the building, he calls the owner but can't get through. Just as he's hesitating whether to just go in, a tenant sees his good looks and takes the initiative to chat with him.

"Are you here to rent an apartment? Oh, it's only 11 o'clock in the morning. Our little landlord must not be up yet. Just knock on his door and if no one answers just pound on it."

Lin Qingyu: "…Little landlord?"

"He's only in his early twenties so that makes him a little landlord." The tenant pointed to the building behind him and said, "Look at this building, it's all his! That building too! Don't be fooled by his young age. He shuffles around in his slippers every day, going to the various apartments to collect rent. It's a complete waste of his XX University degree! I heard that he got a full ride at

that school. But after he graduated, instead of getting a job or going to graduate school, he came straight home and just collects rent!"

Lin Qingyu is slightly taken aback. He wasn't expecting for this little landlord to be his school junior.

Their university is the top in the country, with countless talents from all walks of life. However, this is the first time he's met a junior in the rental industry.

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Qixi Festival

On Lin Qingyu's first Qixi Festival in modern times, Jiang Xing made a perfect date plan in order to give Lin Qingyu a firsthand experience of the sweetness of their married life.

The first stop on their date was the zoo and then the amusement park. Jiang Xing had a great plan. They'd first feed the giraffes and then take a look at the giant pandas. At night, when the fireworks in the amusement park are set off, he and Lin Qingyu will kiss at the highest point of the Ferris wheel. It was all very romantic.

After lunch, the two of them sent Shen Huaishi off to his summer football interest class. They then set off according to their original plan.

The moment they left the range of the air conditioner, waves of heat rushed towards them. It was as though they were standing before the external exhaust of an air conditioner. The road seemed to warp under the high temperature.

They stood before a volcano, one looking at the other and the other looking right on back, looking at each other blankly.

Jiang Xing took out his phone and checked the temperature: 41.5°C.

Jiang Xing: "…"

Lin Qingyu: "…"

Fortunately, Shen Huaishi's football interest class had air conditioning.

After a moment of silence, Jiang Xing said, "Qingyu, should we still go to the zoo?"

Saying "Should we still go?" before a date usually meant only thing: they were trying to cancel.

Lin Qingyu saw through Jiang Xing's thoughts at a glance and asked, "Do you still want to go?"

Jiang Xing thought for a while and said, "Why don't we find somewhere air-conditioned for our date? Do you have anything you want to buy? I'll take you shopping at the mall and we can watch a movie while we're there?"

Lin Qingyu, the future medical student, said, "I want a full set of lab equipment and reagents. I'm going to try to cultivate penicillin. Can these be bought in

the mall?"

Jiang Xing: "…I'm afraid not."

"Then why do we still have to go out?" After just a short while outside, Lin Qingyu's cheeks were already slightly red from the sun. A thin trail of sweat meandered down his nose. "Jiang Xing, your hometown is too hot. I've had enough, I want to go back to the Dayu."

Lin Qingyu, who was losing his cool literally and figuratively, was made a little more vividly beautiful and the future college student felt both distressed and a little like laughing. "Don't be angry. It's not this hot every year. But this year is indeed too much. "

Thinking of how they would have to undergo military training in this scorching heat after school starts, Jiang Xing wished he could pick up Shen Huaishi and follow Lin Qingyu back to the Dayu that very night.

No one would want to go out in this sweltering heat. If this was in the past, Jiang Xing would lie in his air-conditioned room for the entire summer

vacation. But things were different now, he was no longer a salted fish living alone.

He was willing to get up early for Lin Qingyu and he was also willing to go out in the 40-degree heat for Lin Qingyu – if Lin Qingyu wanted to go out, he really… could.

"I've even reserved a table at an overpriced restaurant." Jiang Xing said, "If we drive there, it shouldn't be too hot."

However, Jiang Xing hasn't obtained his driver's license yet, so it would be up to Lin Qingyu, this ancient man, to drive.

Lin Qingyu squinted against the dazzling sunlight. He asked, "Can this super expensive restaurant deliver?"

…The power of nature is too scary; able to turn his amazing wife into a house-bound beauty who just wants to stay at home.

"I can ask. But Qingyu, it's the Qixi Festival." Jiang Xing hesitated, "Qixi is a day for lovers. We can't just stay at home and spend it doing nothing special. — Of course, I don't have to go out. I'll go with whatever you want."

Lin Qingyu said, "Since I've arrived here, you've taken me out for Christmas, New Year's Day, Spring Festival, our anniversary, Valentine's Day, White Day, my birthday, 520, Children's Day, 618 mid-year promotion… …Every time — no, every day is like Qixi. It's enough." Lin Qingyu paused, "If you don't want

to pass the day without doing anything, then let's sleep together tonight and I'll have you work til you're tired."

Is there such a good thing?

Jiang Xing couldn't believe it. His eyes, as he looked at Lin Qingyu, was clearly saying: 'What kind of fantastical wife is this? Thank the Heavens for this gift!'

Lin Qingyu asked, puzzled, "What's wrong?"

"It's nothing." Jiang Xing smiled and grabbed Lin Qingyu's shoulders, walking him back in. "Let's go, Baobei. Laogong will turn on the air conditioner, order you the most expensive takeaway and milk tea and then buy a set of lab equipment online—— How about I buy you a white lab coat and gloves too? Tonight, we can hide from Huaishi in our room and you can show me how you look wearing them…"

Lin Qingyu smiled slightly. "Okay."

The author has something to say:

I wrote this story last year and didn't realize that I'd forgot to put it here orz

my bad QAQ

150

University

Lunch time at the university cafeteria. Jiang Xing held a plate in one hand and a bottle of Coke in the other. After looking around the crowd for a while, he spotted his classmate who came to eat with him.

Jiang Xing sat down opposite his classmate. He saw that his classmate's eyes were dull and his expression was dazed, as if he were already a waste.

Jiang Xing has long been used to this kind of situation and he no longer even bothers to ask. This classmate of his is always like this every time he finishes his major subject class. He took out his mobile phone, lowered his head and read WeChat as he let his classmate rant.

"Why why why!" This classmate yelled, holding his head in his hands, a copy of "Solid State Physics" and "Quantum Mechanics" in his hand. "Why did I choose

physics in the first place? With my IQ, how dare I! Does physics even really exist???"

Jiang Xing didn't even raise his head. "I don't know why you're studying physics. Anyway, I want to go back to ancient times to be the emperor."

His classmate was stunned. "What?"

Jiang Xing explained solemnly, "Physics is the law of all things and all production and construction are inseparable from basic physics. Only by learning physics well can I benefit my people."

His classmate had this constipated look on his face. "You think you're funny, Mr. Campus Heartthrob?"

Jiang Xing shrugged. "If you don't believe me, it's no skin off my back."

His classmate asked again, "Then did you chose a double degree in architecture to build a new palace for yourself, Your Majesty?"

Just as Jiang Xing was about to answer, another person suddenly sat beside him. It was their class representative. Jiang Xing saw that he only had a large steamed bun and a vegetarian dish his dinner plate and asked, "Is this all you're going to eat?"

The class representative said bitterly, "Yeah, I've got no money right now. I just came back from seeing my girlfriend last week and the airline tickets were so

expensive."

Jiang Xing rejoiced at meeting a bosom friend. "Oh? Are you also in a long-distance relationship?"

The class representative said, "Yeah, my girlfriend's in Shanghai. That's more than two hours by plane."

Jiang Xing sighed, "I have a deep understanding of the pain of long-distance relationships." He put down his chopsticks, "Come here. Let's shake hands in camaraderie. Next time you need money, you can always borrow from me."

The class representative firmly clasped Jiang Xing's hand and feeling moved, asked, "My dear brother Jiang! Where's your partner?"

Jiang Xing: "In the Med Studies Department."

Class representative: "Huh?"

Their classmate said, deadpan, "Yeah, you heard that right."

The class representative still didn't quite understand. "Med Studies Department? Our university's Med Studies Department?"

Jiang Xing explained, "All med studies classes are concentrated in the southern area, while our classes are all in the northern area. It takes half an hour to ride

a bicycle from here to the southern area. Isn't that so far?"

The class representative picked up his plate and left, not forgetting to say. "Damn it, Jiang Xing. You're gonna get it one day!"

*

A match was about to be held on the football field of the sports university. In the stands, besides the students of their school, there were also many girls from nearby schools who came to watch the excitement — no one can refuse the charms of a sports student, no one.

But today, the object of attention of the face-obsessed audience wasn't the sports students exuding hormones on the field but a young man standing by the stands.

This young man wasn't as tall as the sports students nor did he have exaggerated muscles. His figure was slender and thin. Just standing there, his whole body exuded an aura that could be seen even from a distance. But despite being so cool and good-looking, the young man was wearing a loose, even a size too big, hoodie. E=mc2 was printed on the hoodie. It looked extra

casual and it was this sense of casualness that lent the young man a sense of real existence.

Shen Huaishi, who was warming up on the court, saw Lin Qingyu walking towards him. Like a primary school student who was about to perform and finally saw his parents, his eyes lit up. “Qingyu!”

Lin Qingyu walked up to Shen Huaishi and said, “Jiang Xing has classes the whole day today, so he can’t come to watch your match. He asked me to tell you sorry.”

Shen Huaishi hurriedly said, “No apologies needed. I’m already very happy that you’re able to come.”

Lin Qingyu smiled. “Do your best out there. I’ll be watching you from the sidelines.”

Shen Huaishi watched Lin Qingyu return to the stands. A teammate patted him on the shoulder and asked, “Who’s that? He isn’t from our school, is he?”

“He’s a good friend of mine.”

When Shen Huaishi said the word “good friend”, he felt a little uneasy at his

presumptuousness but it was overwhelmed by a warm joy.

“He’s fuckin’ attractive.” His teammate said, “Send me his WeChat.”

Shen Huaishi’s face darkened instantly and he interrupted coldly, “Do you know who you are coveting?”

Shen Huaishi has always been a good-tempered and honest person. This was the first time his teammates have seen such a scary expression on his face. His teammates have seen his skills before and they knew that this guy was really

serious about fighting. Not even the Sanda team and boxing team combined were a match for him.

The teammate tried laughing it off. “I’m joking, pretend I didn’t say anything. Pretend I didn’t say anything.”

Lin Qingyu sat down in his seat and received a call from Jiang Xing.

Jiang Xing: “How is it? Has Huaishi’s match started?”

Lin Qingyu: “It’s starting soon. Aren’t you in class?”

“It’s the five minute break between classes.” In the middle of their conversation, Jiang Xing suddenly sighed, “Qingyu.”

“What’s wrong?”

“It’s nothing. I’m just sleepy. I want to sleep and I miss you too.”

Lin Qingyu asked, “Do you want to sleep with me?”

All in all, due to their busy schedules, they haven’t had a serious sex life these past few days.

Jiang Xing didn’t know whether to laugh or cry. “No, that’s not it. Didn’t we do

it yesterday? I also need to rest."

Lin Qingyu said incredulously, "Jiang Xing, are you even resting in your thoughts?"

Jiang Xing said half-jokingly and half-seriously, "Even doing it in your thoughts is tiring, you know?"

"…Amazing."

"Missing you doesn't mean I want to do bad things with you, I just want to see you." Jiang Xing complained, "You woke up too early today, I didn't even get to see you."

Lin Qingyu had classes early this morning and when he woke up, Jiang Xing was still dead asleep beside him. He wanted to let Jiang Xing sleep a little longer and so didn't wake him up. "If I remember correctly, you've got a full schedule today. You won't have time to come to me."

Jiang Xing complained, "True."

"Don't miss me too much, study hard." Lin Qingyu comforted, "I'll go find you when I'm free."

Jiang Xing thought to himself, 'free, my ass'. With four majors between them, his and Lin Qingyu's timetables were crammed full with classes; they sometimes even had classes at night. For others, university life was a

celebration of boundless youth. For him, Lin Qingyu, and Shen Huaishi it was simply two words – Purposeful Learning.

Fortunately, they'd rented an apartment near the school. No matter how busy he and Lin Qingyu were, at least they could sleep in the same bed at night.

In the afternoon, Jiang Xing was sitting in the last row of the lecture hall, feeling drowsy. Suddenly, he heard a voice ask, "Is there anyone sitting beside you?"

Jiang Xing's half-closed eyes suddenly widened. Was that his wife's voice?

He looked up – wow, it really was his wife.

Jiang Xing said, "No one."

The classmate sitting next to him: ?

He was so pleasantly surprised that Jiang Xing couldn't spare a thought to the other people around him. So he dismissed his classmate first, then took Lin Qingyu's hand and pulled him to sit beside him. "Why are you here?"

Lin Qingyu's answer was simple. "I wanted to see you, so here I am."

Jiang Xing still wanted to say something but when he saw the professor walking in, he had no choice but to shut his mouth. However, he did keep

staring at Lin Qingyu.

“Don’t stare at me, Classmate Jiang.” Lin Qingyu opened Jiang Xing’s textbook for him and said softly, “Read.”

Only then did Jiang Xing look away, lowered his eyes and smiled silently.

He hates studying very much. Even though he studies seriously and is able to get high grades, he still hates it.

But he likes Lin Qingyu and this like is far greater than his dislike of studying. Therefore, being able to attend class with Lin Qingyu beside him has also become a pleasure.

*

One day a week later, after Lin Qingyu finished one of his classes, he was pulled into a familiar chest just as he walked out of the classroom.

The book in his hand was taken away and Jiang Xing’s voice sounded above his head: “Good afternoon, Qingyu. I will accompany you to class today. Where’s

your next class?"

Lin Qingyu was quiet for a few seconds and said, "Jiang Xing."

"Hm?"

"My next class is Human Anatomy."

"…I'm sorry." Jiang Xing solemnly returned the book to Lin Qingyu, "Excuse me."

The author has something to say:

Today's Valentine's Day episode~

Thank you all to those who've joined me until the end. Thank you so much! I hope to see you all in my other projects. Thank you!